UNITARIAN AFFIRMATIONS

R. TRAVERS HERFORD

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Unitarian Affirmations

Six Lectures

BY

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SECOND EDITION

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

In preparing a new edition of the following lectures I have thought it best to refrain from any but what seemed to me necessary alterations. I have been told that the lectures have been of some use as a class-book. And, if that is so, it might prove inconvenient that the Second Edition should greatly differ from the first. Beyond correcting misprints, I have only added in footnotes one or two explanations that seemed called for. In the substance of the lectures, the views expressed, I have nothing to alter. They represent my settled convictions; and I only wish that they could mean for others as much as they mean for me.

R. T. H.

STAND, *October*, 1909.

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INTRODUCTION

In the following lectures I have put before me this object: to set forth, in clear and straightforward words, what Unitarians generally *affirm* upon the several subjects chosen for treatment. I call the lectures '*Unitarian Affirmations*.' And I mean that title to convey the fact that the religion which Unitarians hold is not built up on denials, negations, rejections of what other people believe, but rests upon positive grounds, upon what is held to be most real and most true. The Unitarian cares more to say '*this* is true' than to say '*that* is not true.' Unitarians do not have a fixed creed or statement of belief, for reasons which I shall explain in my last lecture. But Unitarians *do believe*; and religion to them is quite

as precious as it is to other Christians. It is, of course, true that most Unitarians express what they believe, in terms different from those adopted by other Christians; and it is also true that they do not regard some extremely important doctrines held by other Christians, as being the best form of expression for the truth contained in those doctrines. But what they care about is to get to something which in their hearts and minds they can feel to be true; they do not care to insist upon a particular way of stating that truth. Therefore, in these lectures I am not going to attack anybody, or try to show that his way of expressing his belief is wrong or mistaken. I have no right to do so, and no wish to do so. I do not seek to unsettle the minds of anyone, in regard to his religious belief. Those who have found a form of doctrinal belief which helps them to live their best life, in the service of God and as disciples of Jesus, I would on no account disturb, still less presume to judge, whatever difference of opinion there may be between

them and me. The duty of Christians, so placed, is not to try and *convert* each other, but to try and *understand* each other, so as to be able to see how it is and why it is that they express their belief in different ways. To such, if there be any such amongst my readers, I offer this explanation of what we Unitarians lay most stress upon in our religious life and thought, in the hope that they may understand what we most care for, and may learn that some popular ideas about us are quite mistaken.

It is possible that these pages may be read by some who are *not* settled in their religious beliefs, who for one reason or another have ceased to feel at home in the theologies of other churches and—as often happens—are drifting without any settled belief at all. To such I want to show that there is a form of religion, strong, deep, and simple, which places no restrictions upon thought or inquiry, which is afraid of nothing that science can prove, which stands in no danger from the extremest criticism of the Bible,

because it holds that all truth—wherever it appears—is divine and to be received and honoured as such. It is a religion which we Unitarians know from long experience to be helpful and sustaining. It does not bid us believe this and that, as mysteries of faith to be accepted without question. It bids us look doctrines, as well as facts, in the face, and worship with the eyes of our mind wide open. It is a religion to live by. And I say the truth of many good men and women, yes and children, whom I have known, when I add that it is a religion to die by.

Such a religion, in its main principles, I shall try to describe to you, in this and the succeeding lectures. I speak as a Unitarian born and bred, who has found in what was taught him as a child, the things which he most trusts in and lives by as a man. I do not apologize for being a Unitarian. I do not defend it. I glory in it.

It is only necessary to add that I commit no one to an agreement with the opinions which I hold and set forth. No Unitarian

ever claims the right to control the belief of his fellows, to require agreement or to condemn disagreement. And if, as is probably the case, there is a considerable amount of agreement amongst Unitarians, upon the main heads of religious belief, that is of their own free choice, and not at all because they are compelled. A doctrinal test of membership is a thing unknown in the churches called Unitarian ; and the attempt to introduce one would raise an instant storm of protest.

So I shall speak solely for myself, and tell you what an average Unitarian thinks about religion. If you find it good and true, it is well. If not, then thank God that you have learnt something better.

GOD

UNITARIANS, before everything else, believe in God. To say of a Unitarian that he is an Atheist is to show an absolute blank ignorance of what Unitarians are. Christians in well-nigh every church are accustomed to sing: '*Nearer, my God, to Thee.*' A Unitarian wrote that hymn. Surely a strange thing to do, if Unitarians were Atheists. And the gifted writer of that hymn was not an exceptional believer amongst a number of infidels. All Unitarians that ever I met love that hymn; and it is sung as a favourite in all our churches. Judge, then, whether or not Unitarians believe in God, and mean a great deal by their belief. Why it is the very ground and foundation of all their religion; without that their religion would

be 'less than nothing and vanity.' 'Well, of course,' you may say, 'you can't have a religion without a belief in God. But many people think you haven't a religion at all; not to call a religion.' As to that, you can form your own opinion. But I will try to tell you something of what Unitarians generally think and believe about God. And I will avoid, so far as I can, using such words as Infinite, Absolute, and the like, which are often more bewildering than helpful.

We think of God, then, first and foremost, as personal, as a being who has a mind and will, one who thinks and knows and feels. He is a spirit, i.e., he has no visible outward bodily form, so that we could see him or touch him or hear him or otherwise perceive him by means of our senses. We mean by God a real living being, and not at all mere Force or Power, or even mere Goodness. We believe that he *has* power, is indeed the source and origin of all power that is to be found anywhere. We believe that he *is* good, and most of all that he *is* loving.

But it is he, the living God, in whom we believe and in whom we trust. It is not some creation of our minds, a sort of glorified image of ourself, without real existence of its own. Matthew Arnold once said that what is called God is 'that, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness.' No doubt it is well to believe only *that*, if you can go no further. But that is only a pale ghost of a belief. I believe in *God the Father Almighty*; and those few and simple words sum up, for me, the whole of what religion means in regard to God. What it means I will presently try to set forth. But before doing so I have to meet the question, 'Why believe in God at all?'

To this question I give the general answer: 'Because to believe in God satisfies the intellect, gives meaning to conscience, and is the natural outcome of our highest and purest feelings.' Here we have three converging lines of thought, all ending in God. They are not intended to be a *proof* that God exists. For, in the nature of things, there can be no such

proof. If God exist at all, he must be the source and origin of everything else; therefore you cannot find something previous to him from which you can draw the conclusion that he exists. Reflect that you cannot *prove* even your own existence; and then you will see that real knowledge may rest upon something stronger than proof.

Let us briefly follow these three converging lines of thought which lead up to God. The first is, that to believe in God satisfies the intellect. When we think about what we see around us in the visible creation, in earth and sea and sky, then we observe on every hand change and movement. The sun rises and sets, as the round earth spins on her axis. Rain and snow fall; the clouds are driven by the wind. The wind blows now from one side, now from another. The various living creatures are born, grow up, and die. The plants and trees put forth their leaves in the spring, to be followed by flowers and fruit. And so on, through the endless story of nature's wonderful works.

We see some of these whenever we look around us. And if we think about them, we cannot help the further thought that for all these changes there must be a cause. There must be something that makes them take place. What is that cause? Can we understand anything about it? That is the question on which the intellect seeks to be satisfied.

Now our own experience gives us a hint as to the answer. We are able, to some extent, to do things to produce changes and movements, to cause events to take place. We do this by our power of will. As I speak to you now, for example, it is that I will, in my own mind, to utter certain sounds in order to convey my thoughts to you in words. In our own experience, therefore, the power of will is that by which we cause the things we do.

We follow the suggestion thus given, and say that behind all that takes place in nature there is the power of will, as the cause of them. The demand of the intellect for a cause of all that takes place in nature is satisfied by the belief that

there is a Will, a power to change and to do, knowing what it does ; a Mind possessing intelligence and power ; and that this mind is the real and actual cause of all that takes place in nature, the final source of all existence except its own.[1]

That is the line of intellectual approach to God. Of course I cannot, in a lecture do more than sketch the argument in barest outline.

In the second place, the belief in God gives meaning to the conscience. When, as often happens to us, we feel that we *ought* to do so and so, what do we mean

[1] I wish to qualify what is said above as to the need of ascribing to the causal action of God the various movements in the Universe. From the point of view of Science, the whole Universe is a complex system, complete in itself, whose action is sufficiently explained by the observed forces at work within it, and for which no beginning is assignable or necessary. From the point of view of Religion and Philosophy, however, this whole system, the fact of its existence and the continuance of its working, implies the constant exercise of the will and power of God. See the argument fully presented in Prof. Upton's Hibbert Lectures, pp. 194–234.

by *ought*? Suppose we feel that we ought to do some disagreeable task. We do not mean that we are compelled to do it, actually made to do it by a force that we cannot resist. Certainly we do not mean that we like to do it. We don't like it at all, and would rather not do it. But we *ought* to do it. We say it is our conscience that gives us this feeling of 'ought.' But there is something besides our conscience in the matter. 'Ought' implies a demand for our obedience to an authority which we cannot help owning. That which we feel we ought to do is enjoined upon us as a command from somewhere. We may disobey that command, but we cannot get rid of it. If we disobey it, then we feel what is called remorse; we know we have done wrong, and that we could have done right. Now what is this authority which has a right to demand our obedience? Only a person can have authority over persons. Therefore, the authority is either in ourselves, or in our fellow-men, or in some one greater than these. It is not in our-

selves. There can be no effort needed to obey our own commands. It is not in our fellow-men; for often we feel that we ought to refuse obedience to the demands of public opinion. It is, therefore, in some one greater than these, a personal being who is righteous, and possesses the authority of perfect holiness. Conscience, accordingly, is the means whereby we feel the authority of this moral Ruler who claims our obedience.

This is the second line of approach to God; and it leads us to a living personal being, who is perfectly holy, and who also enters into communication with us, by making us aware of his will concerning us.

This last is an extremely important point. By the line of the intellect we only get to the thought of a Supreme Mind that is the cause of all. By the line of the conscience we are led into personal relations with a Supreme Mind who is holy.

In the third place, the belief in God is the natural outcome of the highest

and purest affections. These highest and purest affections are reverence and love. These are always directed to a personal object, and never to mere things. Reverence is that which we feel towards one whom we own as morally better than we are. And love is that which draws one mind to another in the desire for union. Neither reverence nor love find their perfect fulfilment in the human relationships. Reverence must needs look upward still, even in the presence of the noblest of men. And the love, which is the light and joy and peace of many a beautiful home, the benediction of many a perfect marriage, still points beyond to one who is himself the highest object and the deepest source of love. These highest aspirations of the human soul seek for a personal object in whom they may be perfectly fulfilled. And they find that object. Reverence and love bring the soul into actual communion with a Being whom it can only worship and adore as perfectly good and whom it knows and feels to be loving. It is said that ' the pure in heart see God,'

i.e., have direct and immediate personal knowledge of him. Such direct and immediate personal knowledge is reached through Reverence and Love. And the belief in God rests ultimately upon such personal knowledge of him.

Here, then, we have three converging lines of approach to God: the line of the intellect, which leads us to the thought of a supreme will, an intelligent mind, causing and controlling all things; the line of the conscience, which makes us aware of a supreme moral authority resting in a Person who has a right to claim obedience; and the line of the affections, which leads us straight up to One who loves us, and whom we cannot but reverence and love. These three lines converge. The Creator, the Moral Ruler, and the Supreme Love are one and the same Being; and we speak of, and speak to, him by the name of GOD.

By one or other, or all, of these lines of approach, I believe that all knowledge of God and belief in him has come, which ever has come, to human souls. Nothing

more is involved in them beyond what belongs to ordinary human nature. In other words, it is natural to man as man to know something of God.

But I am quite ready to be told that many people do not come to their belief in God in these ways, or, perhaps, do not come to a belief in him at all. I therefore add this : that we learn of God not merely through our own experience of him, which may be very slight and feeble, but through the experience of others who have known more than we. There have been, from time to time, men and women who have had a very deep and clear faith in God, a real knowledge of him, even the same kind of knowledge that a friend has of his friend, or a son of his father. From such as these, whom we call prophets and revealers of God, we learn to know more of him, our own feeble faith is made stronger and God becomes more real to us. But these prophets and revealers, in their turn, have learned what they know of God through those same lines of approach, already described ; and that

would be true, even if those prophets and revealers had been miraculously inspired to make known the deep things of God. So that when it is said, as it often is said, that we learn our belief in God from the Bible, we are still learning from the personal experience of other and greater souls, of which the Bible contains the record. Moreover, our own belief in God is strengthened and made clearer by the fact that in all times and countries people have believed—if not in one God, at all events in something that was divine. The outward form of such belief, as expressed in doctrine and practice, is endlessly varied. But beneath all is the belief in some more than human power, invisibly present and active in the world. And, in our own immediate surroundings, we find that we are not alone in believing in God; the experience of others repeats our own, and thereby helps to confirm it, as ours in like manner helps to confirm theirs.

So we have the result that belief in God, while it is ultimately a result of our own experience, is yet greatly helped

and increased by the experience of others, both of those on much the same religious level as ourselves, and of those to whom we look up with reverence as prophets and revealers of God.

We have, then, a belief in God as a Personal Being, the Creator, the Moral Ruler, the heavenly Father; and under the name God we include all and everything that we believe to be divine.

And of God we believe that he is near us, that he loves us, and that we can pray to him. Real personal communication between him and us is an essential part of our religion. So it is of all Christian religion; and I only mention the fact to show that Unitarians lay as much stress upon it as other Christians do. It is often supposed that we have a cold religion and worship a far-off God. If our religion is indeed cold, that is because we do not live up to it. But he whom we worship is not a far-off God; if we felt him to be so we should not call him our Father.

But many will say, and very naturally, 'How can it be that Unitarians believe

that God is so near to them, and that he hears their prayers and loves them ? For they do not believe in the Trinity and the Incarnation ; and without these, we do not see how to think of God as a living presence in human lives. If it were not that we may worship God the Son as well as God the Father, we should have only a cold dark mystery of Power to worship, whom we could not love but only fear. And if it were not for the belief that God in Christ once dwelt on earth among men, we should have no assurance that he knows and loves us. You Unitarians deny the Trinity and the Incarnation ; and therefore it seems to us that your religion must be cold and unsatisfying to the real needs of the soul.'

So far as I can gather, I think that sums up the chief feeling in the minds of Trinitarians towards us. It is here, accordingly, that explanation is most needed of the way in which Unitarians express their belief in the nearness and the love of God.

I shall not try to show that the doctrines

of the Trinity and the Incarnation are erroneous; but they are not the only way of expressing the truths contained in them. And the general Unitarian position is this: that the truths of the nearness and the love of God and the reality of personal communion with him may be stated in a form much simpler than those great doctrines. If this be so, then, naturally, we do not retain what seem to us the complicated, and only partially true, doctrinal forms of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

I think that we shall all agree that as between the doctrine of the Trinity and that of the Unity of God, the real matter of importance is not a question of number —of three as opposed to one. The root-meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity I take to be the assurance of personal communion with a living and loving God. Nothing less than the passionate desire for such assurance would have triumphed, for all those centuries, over the intellectual difficulties which, no one will deny, are presented by the doctrines of

the Trinity and the Incarnation. When, therefore, Unitarians decline to accept those doctrines, it is not that they claim to know that God *is one* and that he *is not three* Persons; it is that they have learnt what seems to them 'a more excellent way' of expressing their assurance of personal communion with a living and loving God. Trinitarians and Unitarians are both trying to say the same thing, namely, that God is a living spirit of love, with whom we can hold communion. We all believe that; Unitarians quite as much as Trinitarians. We differ only in how we say it. And Unitarians claim the right to say it in the way that seems truest to them, without being condemned for not saying it in some one else's way.

What, then, is our way? It is to say simply, that '*God is our Father in heaven.*' If that name is thought to be altogether too simple and insufficient, it is at least the name by which we have learnt from Jesus to think of and pray to God. And Unitarians, contrary to what many people suppose, have a very great reverence for

Jesus, and look up to him as the one above all who has revealed God to man. He taught us to call God 'our Father in Heaven.' And that name seems to us to mean so much, that we need no other. *Our Father.* What name can bring us nearer to God than that? Does not that name express the nearness and the love of God to human souls? Does it not remind us of how he watches over us and cares for us, and how we depend on him? Is not the relation between father and children the closest that there can be, where one mind depends on another? Surely, it was just because the name Father did thus express the closest possible relation of love and care, that Jesus chose the name, and always used it himself, and taught his disciples to use it. The name is so simple, that a child can use it and know what he is saying; while yet the name is wide and deep enough to take in all that human souls can know and feel of the love of God. It was sufficient for Jesus. Can we need more, or other, than he needed?

Then, why should it be thought that we worship only a far-off God, impassive and awful? Doubtless, God is the creator of all worlds, from eternity to eternity; and our poor thought cannot comprehend him. But it is not as such that we know him and love him. It is as the Father in Heaven, the Father Almighty; he is none the less, but all the more, the Father, for being also the Almighty. Whatever of love and goodness and tender care, of wisdom and justice, and knowledge, belong to the thought of 'Father,' these are all made perfect in the thought of 'Heavenly Father' or 'Father Almighty.' To call him so, does not take God away from us; but brings him near, and helps us to know him and love him as the one supreme perfect Being, nearer and dearer than the closest of earthly friends. How should not we know that our Father will help us, and guide us, and comfort us, in our troubles, and teach us to do right? And how should we need any mediator to come between us and our Father? And how should we not be content to bear

humbly and patiently the trials we do not understand, since it is our Father in whose loving hands we are? What more could we wish for and strive for in life, than to do the will of our Father, and live as brethren with the rest of his children? And what can we have to fear, when our time comes to die, knowing that it is our Father who calls us home? And *this*, it is said, is a cold religion, and the worship of a far-off God! Well, words are poor things; and perhaps in mere words it may seem cold and bare, to those who are used to the more elaborate theologies of other churches. But think well what is implied in the words, and see if in such a belief in 'God the Father Almighty,' there be not indeed a strong, deep, and living religion. That is our religion. If we fail to live up to it, it is because it is so great and glorious and full of Divine beauty. But that is our ideal. That is what helps us to do our best, and to be our best; and the deep foundation of all our trust, all our hope, and all our love, is God, our Father in Heaven.

Do you wonder that having such a belief, we should be content with the simple words in which it is expressed and should put aside all other forms ?

We have no quarrel—God forbid—with those who worship him as the Trinity in Unity, and believe that he became incarnate in Jesus. But we see no reason to confuse our minds with distinctions between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, or with perplexities about the human and the Divine nature in Christ. All these seem to us needless and uncalled for, and we have simply dropped them ; not knowing what more there could possibly be in religion that is not already assured to us, in the deep conviction that God is our Father. In holding this position, we think we are keeping close to the teaching of Jesus. It will hardly be maintained that he ever said anything about either the Trinity or the Incarnation ; and it is undeniable that he did call God by the name of the Father in Heaven, and did represent the relation between God and man as those of Father

and children. The Sermon on the Mount, and especially the Lord's Prayer, are, as I shall show in my next lecture, unshakeable evidence of what Jesus himself thought and believed about God and his relation to man. Unitarians usually take their stand upon this undisputed and indisputable teaching of Jesus, in regard to God; and refuse to add anything to it—refuse, i.e., to change the simplicity of the religion which Jesus taught, and which was his own religion, for that more elaborate doctrinal teaching of Paul and John, which finally led up to the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and also the Atonement.

I shall, of course, have more to say about Jesus, in my next lecture. I only mention him here, in order to claim the sanction of his great authority for the simple but deep belief in God, which to Unitarians is the very heart of their religion.

But probably some of you will be wanting to say, that 'the religion of you Unitarians, at all events your belief in God, lacks one essential thing, however

true and beautiful it may be. We Trinitarians believe that God once actually appeared on earth in human form; he was seen, and those who saw him have borne witness of him. After that, there can be no possible room for doubt in the reality of God's living presence in human lives. But you Unitarians do not believe that God ever thus appeared in human form. What guarantee, then, have you of the reality of God's living presence in human lives?'

As a Unitarian, I think that Unitarians do not greatly concern themselves about this. For my own part, I could not believe in a God who had once become visible: that would be to me far more of a difficulty than a help. And I do not feel the need of any such guarantee of the real living presence of God in human lives. Surely, there is guarantee sufficient without it. To believe in God as the Father in Heaven, is not just to say so many words without meaning. It is to believe that, as God the Creator is present everywhere through the wide universe,

so in like manner he is present as the Father in every human soul. And whether or not that soul is aware of God, it must be that God knows that soul through and through. And not only that, but that God, if he is the Father at all, always was and always will be the Father. The revelation in Jesus did not make him so, but only declared him so. But, indeed, what need of guarantee, other than the inward witness that we have in our own souls of the real presence of God? You say that you have real communion with Christ. It does not seem to you strange or impossible, that there should be actual communion between your soul and the immortal divine Christ. We say that we have real communion with God. It does not seem strange or impossible to us, that there should be actual communion between our soul and our Father in Heaven. What you call Christ, we call our Father; and the deep experience of the soul is the same in each case, for to each it is communion with the living God. The difference between us in this

matter, is not in regard to the spiritual fact in which we believe, but in the way in which we describe that fact. We keep to the perfectly simple conception of God already set forth, as the one supreme Being who includes all that is Divine; and we do not disturb the simplicity of this conception of God, by introducing into it a relation to Jesus which is difficult if not impossible to define, and which, to us at all events, seems quite unnecessary, and, indeed, wholly without foundation. Whether we are right or wrong in so thinking, is a question upon which opinions will differ. I do not argue the point. My purpose is to set forth the ideas which Unitarians hold in regard to religion, and not to assail those which other Christians may hold. I have tried to do this in regard to their belief in God; and if I have made clear to you that Unitarians do very earnestly believe in God, as a living Spirit of Love and Goodness in all human lives, then I shall have done what I wanted to do. We differ from other Christians in the doc-

trinal form which we give to our belief in God—not in the reality, the truth, which lies at the heart of that belief. Do not go away and say, 'These Unitarians do not believe in the Trinity and the Incarnation; therefore, they have no religion.' Say rather, 'These Unitarians have another way of saying what we say; but they mean the same thing in the end.' Say, if you will, 'The Trinity of "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three persons in one God," means more to us than what we find in "God the Father Almighty." And our way is better than the Unitarian way.' Say that, if you will. But do us the justice to admit that to us our way seems better and truer; and that it is because we *do* care about religion, and *do* very earnestly believe in God, that we cannot be content to express our belief in doctrinal forms which for us are not true. It is because we *do* care about religion, that we choose rather to be shunned as unbelievers, and denied the name of Christians, than to be false to the truth which God has shown us.

What I set myself to do in this lecture, I have done. It were an impossible task, even to mention, let alone enlarge upon, all the questions which are raised by any doctrine of God. My aim was not to present such a complete doctrine of God. It was to show that Unitarians have such a doctrine, and that, while they express it in a form different from that common to all other Christian churches, the difference is in the form, not in the substance. Unitarians worship God as the Father Almighty; and in that name is all the height and depth and length and breadth of the unspeakable greatness of God, together with the unsearchable riches of his Love. We, therefore, fear not to draw near, in humble prayer, even to the Eternal and Infinite God, and say even to him, '*Our Father*, who art in Heaven.'

JESUS CHRIST

THAT there can be a Unitarian affirmation concerning Christ, will seem strange to those who think of Unitarians chiefly as a set of people who 'deny the Lord that bought them.' That easy and damaging misrepresentation may still be heard from time to time, and its only excuse is ignorance; hardly a valid excuse, in these days of increasing knowledge and growing religious sympathy.

It is, of course, true that Unitarians do by no means accept all that is believed about Christ in the popular theologies; but it is none the less true that Unitarians have a very great reverence for him, and, in the true sense of the word, they believe in him. To describe to you the way in which we think of Christ, to show you how

he is by Unitarians revered and loved, while not worshipped, is my task. I shall speak solely for myself; and it is right to say that many Unitarians do not at all agree with some of the views that I hold. On this, as on every other subject, we each think for ourselves.

When I was at college, and for some years afterwards, I used to feel as if Christ was a somewhat unreal personage, and I took more interest in historical questions concerning his career than in his own life and personality. But 'No man,' said a great preacher, 'can escape Christ.' And, as I have grown out of the raw confidence of youth, I have found myself drawn more and more to Jesus, as an object not of critical study, but of reverence and of love. I could truly say that I have found Jesus; and I would say it, only that it would be understood in a way that I do not at all mean. If then, as a Unitarian, I make an 'affirmation' concerning Jesus, my attempt will be to set forth a positive belief, and not to build up a theory out of the denials of

popular doctrines. With what plainness I can, I shall relate how the thought of Jesus, once dim and confused and vague to me, has gradually become clearer and more distinct. And though it might seem to some that, after all, I have not found Christ, I shall still believe that I have found Jesus. A distinction not without a difference.

Who was Jesus ? or Christ ? That was the question to which I tried to find the answer. 'A simple question,' many will say. 'Read your New Testament and you will find there all that you need.' No doubt. I did read my New Testament, and have read it many times; but the answer to the question did not appear for a long while. My difficulty was that the New Testament seemed to give a confused account of its chief personage, so that I could not make out who or what he really was. The first three Gospels told about one who seemed to be a man, not unlike one of the ancient prophets. The fourth Gospel described one who seemed to be much more than a man, who was indeed,

according to the writer, ' the Word made flesh,' i.e., virtually God in human form. The writings of Paul gave another conception of Christ, and one very difficult to grasp ; because Paul speaks of ' putting on the Lord Jesus Christ,' of ' Christ being formed in our hearts,' and he says that Christians are ' the body of Christ ; ' phrases full of deep meaning, no doubt, but which can hardly be called easy to understand. Then the Epistle to the Hebrews had yet a fourth presentation of Christ, in terms borrowed chiefly from the Jewish ritual. The minor writings of the New Testament all contributed something to the general presentation of Christ ; and the result of the whole, to me, was merely a confusion of thought, that gave no satisfying answer to the question, ' Who was Jesus ? ' A formless radiance of glory, neither human nor divine, or perhaps both, but such that no feature is permanent—that seemed to me the result of taking what the New Testament taught concerning Christ, *and combining it all together*. Others may have been

more fortunate; I simply state the difficulty I found. Then came the question, 'Why take all these things together? They cannot all be true; because, if they were all true, then they would all fit in with one another, and produce a clear and harmonious picture.' So I gradually learnt to distinguish what Paul said about Jesus from what John said about him, and both these from the account in the earlier Gospels. And the question was, 'Which of these three was the truest presentation of him?' Perhaps they are all more or less true; but still they are so different that one must be more like the real Jesus than the others are. For a long time I saw no way of deciding the point. I knew well enough which of the three seemed to me most real and most living; but I had no firm foundation on which to rest my belief. Certainly Paul and John were great men, far greater in religious genius than those whom we call Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Presumably, then, they were much better able to say truly what Jesus

was. Yet the Christ of Paul seemed to be very different from the Christ of John. If those two great writers differed so much in their conception of Christ, how was it possible to rely on the witness of either as against the other? Gradually a new aspect of the main question began to show itself. 'Was it not possible to get back to Jesus himself, past the men who wrote about him?' I do not mean this in the sense of actual personal communication with Jesus. I mean that I looked to see whether there was anything to be known with certainty about him that should not depend for its truth upon the trustworthiness of the Gospel writers. Was there anything in which could be found his own witness of himself? If there was any such thing, it must, of course, be found somewhere in the four Gospels. The Epistles of Paul do not profess to do more than teach concerning him. They cannot contain any witness of Jesus concerning himself. The inquiry, therefore, was limited to the four Gospels. And, as it is a known fact that the Gospel

of John was written after the other ones, it was natural to look first in the earlier Gospels (which may, for many practical purposes, be taken together, and considered as one body of tradition).

In those earlier Gospels there are to be found recorded a great many sayings which Jesus is said to have uttered, and a great many deeds which he is said to have done. (The Gospel of John, also, contains recorded sayings and deeds; but not many which are also contained in the earlier Gospels.) In those records of words and deeds, what guarantee have we that they really were spoken and done? That is what I asked myself. And, of course, I was not free to say, 'They must all be true, because they are contained in the Bible.' My whole difficulty had arisen from taking all that was said about Jesus, in the New Testament, as being of equal truth. So I reasoned thus with myself:—Here is a case in which Jesus is said to have *done* something, for example, walked through the fields on the Sabbath Day. Very likely he did so; but what is the

ground of believing that he did so? It is the word of the writer who set it down in his record. And if it should turn out that the writer was ill-informed, or otherwise untrustworthy, then we could not be sure that this alleged event really took place. I don't say that the writer is untrustworthy; but only that we are dependent on him alone for a knowledge of things done by Jesus. If he reported incorrectly, or if he exaggerated, or if he were to invent actions and ascribe them to Jesus, we should say that he was an unreliable witness; but we should not be any nearer to the real fact of the case.

But now, here is a passage in which Jesus is reported to have *said* something, for example, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. That is, by common consent, one of the very greatest of the sayings ascribed to Jesus, and I choose it on that account. One thing is perfectly certain about that Parable. Some one really uttered it. The real author of it, whoever he was, must have been a man of very great religious power, and very deep insight into spiritual

things. It is quite beyond the power of any average man to invent such a Parable. Therefore, it cannot have been invented by the writer of the Gospel, who, to judge by the character of his work, was not more than an average man. The existence of that parable is proof positive that there was living, about that time, a supremely great religious genius. And this fact does not rest upon the trustworthiness of the Gospel writer. He merely wrote down the Parable; but we receive it on its own witness not on his. We read it, and say to ourselves—the author of this must have been a man of wonderful religious power, no matter what the Gospel writer was. In this Parable, we get to the real mind and thought of him who spoke it; so that it is his own witness of himself, the unconscious disclosure of his own religious nature.

The like result follows, if we take the Lord's Prayer, or the Beatitudes, or others of the greatest sayings contained in the earlier Gospels. These all give absolute proof of the existence, about that time,

of a man of supremely great religious power; and, further, they show us something of his real self, his mind, and personal nature. This man can be no other than the Jesus of Nazareth, who was living about that time. Therefore, in and through these greatest of the sayings recorded in the earlier Gospels, we get back to the real Jesus, and have not merely the proof that he was great, but an actual knowledge of himself. And not only that, but this proof does not depend upon the trustworthiness of the Gospel writers. It cannot, therefore, be shaken by any facts which might be produced to show that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were less to be relied upon than John. It is not necessary to rely upon any of them. And the reason why I have worked out this proof from the earlier Gospels, and not from John, is just that those Gospels are earlier. The material which they contain, and which discloses to us the real mind and soul of a marvellously great man, was all in existence, and all written down, before ever the

Gospel of John appeared. Hence the proof stands fast, quite apart from anything that the Gospel of John may contain. It is no doubt true, that John understood Jesus better than Matthew, Mark, and Luke understood him. But, and this is the all-important point, the witness of John cannot over-ride the witness of Jesus himself to himself, as contained in the greatest sayings recorded in the earlier Gospels.

The proof that I have here set forth, is the answer which, in the course of years, I have worked out to the question, 'Who was Jesus?' And when I said, I have found Jesus, I meant that in the witness, the unshakeable witness, of the greatest of the sayings to the mind and soul of their author, I think that I get back to the real Jesus. Whatever else may or may not be true about him, this is true, that he was such as those great sayings imply—a man of mighty soul, out of whose fulness and depth those words were spoken.

Here, then, is a firm foundation of positive fact, in regard to Jesus; and on

this foundation can be built up all the rest of our thought concerning him. I use the result already obtained, namely, the disclosure of the real man, in and through his great sayings, as a standard by which to try all and everything else which is recorded about him in the New Testament. I shall not, of course, attempt to do this in detail. The task would need a volume, rather than a lecture. I will only point out some of the results which follow from thus applying the standard of the real Jesus.

Speaking generally, nearly all of the sayings in the earlier Gospels appear to be genuine. Some few there are which, for my own part, I cannot believe to have been spoken by Jesus. Amongst these are the Parables of the Unjust Judge and the Unjust Steward. Taking all the authentic sayings together, so far as they are yet obtained, we see Jesus as one who regarded God as his Father, and men as his brethren—one who gives no hint or suggestion of being other than a man. Accordingly, when we find in the earlier

Gospels that, on the whole, his outward life is described as that of a man, we may take the general description as being true in its broad outlines, whatever may be the case in regard to details. That is to say, we may be quite sure that Jesus of Nazareth preached in Galilee, the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. He spent some months in that part of the country, during which time his fame spread far and wide. Some of those who heard him joined themselves to him as his disciples; but he made enemies as well as friends, because in his preaching he opposed and condemned the recognized teachers and institutions of religion. He went up to Jerusalem in order to declare his Gospel in the head-quarters of the established religion, and he was there put to death, on a political charge, but really by the contrivance of those who feared him as a dangerous heretic. He was executed as a common criminal, by being nailed to a cross. That is the outline of the life of Jesus, so far as it can be certainly known, and leaving out details.

Within these lines was passed the life of the Jesus whom we have learned to know. And, if we are at all to realize and understand the results which flowed from his life, we must learn really to know him, in the way I have suggested already. We shall then have before us the thought of a man whose whole nature was filled with religion, who, in all that he did and said, was conscious of the presence of God. To him, God was the Father in Heaven; by that name he always spoke of God, and prayed to him; presumably, because no other name so truly and so fully expressed what he knew God to be. The closest possible union, of reverence and love, of trust and obedience, was his relation to God; the relation between a human soul and the Father Almighty; but, *a relation between two*—not the blending of two into one. Jesus, as we know him, on his own witness of himself, never even remotely suggested that he was more, or other, than a human soul depending on God, a child looking up to his Father, and living his whole life in

perfect obedience, trust, and love. Such, merely hinted in bare and inadequate words, was the spiritual nature of Jesus. If he were such in himself, then it must have followed of necessity that his words and deeds, his whole outward life, should be the expression of his inner nature. So he went about doing good; and so he spoke, not as one who sets himself to teach either moral lessons or theological doctrines, but as one whose heart was filled with the love of God, and who spoke out of the fulness of his heart.

Such a man could by no means pass unnoticed in a crowd. When the soul of a man is alive, it shines in his face and thrills in his words; and what must it have been, when the man was Jesus? No wonder that the multitudes came together to hear him, and hung on his words listening! No wonder that the mothers 'brought to him their babes, that he should touch them'; or that all who were in trouble, need, sickness, or any other adversity, should instinctively turn to him. No wonder that he spoke 'as

one having authority'; or that men should listen, in dumb amazement at the things he said, and confess to themselves that 'never man so spake.' Always and everywhere, as he moved about, a man amongst men, there was felt the presence and power of a mighty soul, deep, calm, and strong; a spirit pure as the light, a love that went forth to every one of those who, with him, were children of the Father in Heaven. Seeing him, and feeling the influence of his personality, they learnt what it meant that God was the Father in Heaven, and mankind his children. They did not learn that as a mere doctrine in words; but they awakened to the knowledge of it, as they beheld him. And, 'whereas they were blind, now they saw.'

In all this, I am trying to put into words what I believe to be the real Jesus, as he actually was when he lived on earth. And I would that I could find words to describe him, as I seem to see him clear in my mind. I know not, indeed, what was his outward appearance; for all

knowledge of that has been lost beyond recovery. But the real mind of him, the spirit which dwelt in him and revealed itself in those great words which still we read, that is not lost; and now, as on the hills of Galilee, or in the streets of Jerusalem, we may know him as indeed he was; and, where our poor words fail us, own him with loving hearts the greatest of God's children on earth.

If, so far, you have gone along with me in this attempt to present the real Jesus, I would ask you to bear in mind what we have learnt, while I go on to a further stage of my argument, where agreement will be less probable. I said, at the outset, that my difficulty, in trying to learn who was Jesus, arose from the fact, that in the New Testament there seemed to be several conceptions or theories of Jesus, which did not altogether harmonize with one another. These are—the theory set forth in the early Gospels, the theory held by Paul, and the theory taught by John. I have to try and show how these three are severally related to what I hold

to be the real Jesus. If I can do this, then the answer will be given to many questions which will probably have occurred to the reader, in regard to leading points of the belief in Christ which is held by most Christians. I take this course, so as to avoid controversy, by showing why it is that Unitarians, who as a rule hold some such belief concerning Jesus as that which I have indicated, do not include in their belief many important features of popular orthodoxy.

In the first three Gospels we have the earliest attempt to write the life of Jesus. Those three Gospels, as I have said, may be classed together as being three representatives of the same tradition. They differ in their details, but the general outline of what they relate is the same in all, and their conception of Jesus is the same in all. They contain, not merely the actual words of Jesus, but also tradition about him; for the earliest Gospel was not written down till at least thirty years after his death. The real Jesus, such as I have tried to suggest,

lived for a year before the public gaze, and then passed from earth by a cruel death. While he lived he exercised upon all who came in contact with him a powerful influence, so that whether men loved him or feared him they could not remain indifferent to him. After he was gone, the question could no longer be kept back, 'Who was this wonderful man?' That question had indeed been asked while he yet lived; and the answer was ready, but he forbade it, 'He was the Messiah of whom the ancient prophets had spoken, the man sent from God to set up the kingdom of Heaven.' Accordingly, it is as the Messiah—or the Christ—that the earlier Gospels describe him. This is the first theory about him. Those Gospels are not a mere impartial record of what he said and did; they are written with a definite purpose, or at least with a definite conception of what he was. And that which really produced the Gospels was the enormous personal influence of Jesus upon those who had seen and heard him, and the need of account-

ing for and explaining in some way that enormous influence. Thirty years, or more, elapsed between the crucifixion and the writing down of the earliest Gospel. And in those thirty years it is not wonderful that imagination began to work upon fact, so as to adorn the bare and scanty record of that wonderful life with a dignity deemed more suited to it. The person of Jesus was not indeed raised above the level of humanity. In these early Gospels he is always represented as a man; but as a man specially favoured and endowed from God. Thus, according to the general belief of that time and country, that a man of God must have power to do wonderful things as 'signs' of his office, Jesus is represented in the earlier Gospels as doing many wonderful works—usually known as miracles. When you read in the Gospel that Jesus did a miracle, that is the Jewish way of saying that he was a man of God. The real Jesus, whom we have learnt to know, did many works of kindness, especially to sick persons; but he did not need the aid

of such things as miracles to make people own him as a man of God. The miracles only came in after he was gone, as being what it was thought such a one as he must have done.

And, in a somewhat similar way, as the figure of Jesus began to loom larger and larger in the memory of those who had seen him, and in the imagination of those who had not, it was felt that the beginning of such a wonderful life must also have been wonderful, and not after the manner of ordinary lives. Accordingly we have the beautiful poetry of the Christmas story—of the angels and shepherds, the wise men from the East, and the little child lying in the manger. All this belongs to poetry, not to history; these things were not told of Jesus till long after he was gone. They tell us nothing of his real birth; they show how deep an impression his life and character had made upon his followers. To take them as literal accounts of actual fact, and to say that the origin of Jesus and his appearance upon earth were such as the Gospels

describe, seems to me to be an injury to the memory of the real Jesus, and to the purity of the home where he was born.

If the beginning of his life was adorned with marvels, by way of accounting for the spiritual intensity of Jesus himself, so also the end of his life was described in terms of the miraculous. The Resurrection stories are attempts to explain the conviction which the disciples had that Jesus, immediately after his death, was living in heaven. A purely spiritual fact is thus represented in a far from spiritual form; and the stories of the empty grave, the darkness, the earthquake, and the rent veil of the Temple have little indeed of relation to the real Jesus. Speaking generally of the three earlier Gospels, their writers were profoundly conscious of his greatness, the vivid intensity of his spiritual life, and they described that in the best terms they knew, the terms of miracle. Miracle belongs to a lower plane of religious thought than pure spiritual energy. The earlier Gospels in their presentation of Jesus show him, so to

speak, translated from the higher to the lower; and in place of the real Jesus they give us only the Jewish Messiah.

That, then, is the view of Jesus as the earlier Gospels represent him, the tradition current amongst those who had come nearest to him. In the writings of Paul we have the thoughts of a man who had not himself seen Jesus, or, if he had, yet attached no importance to the fact. As he says himself, 'If we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no more.' To Paul, the one fact of supreme importance concerning Jesus was his resurrection from the dead. Upon that one fact, of whose truth he felt convinced by his own personal experience, he built his whole doctrine of Christ. In his letters he seeks to explain how the coming of Christ into the world was part of the divine plan by which God effected the deliverance of mankind from the bondage of sin. In the view of Paul, Christ was a means, not an end—a chosen instrument of God, set apart for his high function before the world was made, and in the

fulness of time sent into the world to fulfil his mission.

To describe even in outline the theology of Paul lies quite beyond the scope of this lecture. What I want to make clear is this: that Paul does not add to our knowledge of the real Jesus, as he actually was. What he gives us is a theory of God's dealings with man—a theory which bears ample witness to the genius of Paul as a thinker, and to the richness and depth of his spiritual nature. The whole theory turns upon the function which he assigned to Christ; it is his explanation of why Christ appeared on earth. He did not set himself to portray what I have called the real Jesus, whom, indeed, he hardly knew. He knew Jesus only as the risen Christ; he had not known him in that fuller revelation of himself which he had given in his words and deeds and personal character while yet he lived on earth. The Christ of whom Paul speaks is an ideal figure, and cannot be used to supplement our knowledge of the real Jesus. Paul's doctrine of Christ, in all

its vast length and breadth, must be judged on its own merits; my point is that while that doctrine would not have been formed unless Jesus, as we know him, had actually lived, yet Paul's doctrine is only a theory founded upon him, and not a contribution to our real knowledge of him. If, further, what we have learnt of the real Jesus excludes much of what Paul says in reference to Christ, all the more we are bound to put aside the witness of Paul, except as evidence of that greatness, which we know already without his witness. It is to Paul, and not to Jesus himself, that we owe all the doctrines which have been built up into the scheme of salvation, beginning with the Fall of Man and ending with the Atonement. These—whether true or not—are only theory about Christ; and in these we have not the mind of Christ, but the mind of Paul.

That, then, is the second conception of Jesus, to be found in the New Testament. The Jewish Messiah portrayed in the earlier Gospels, the purely human being as

described by those nearest to him in time, was replaced in the mind of Paul by an ideal figure scarcely to be called human, though Paul would have shrunk from calling it divine. Both these were attempts to account for the vivid intensity of the spiritual life of Jesus, and for the deep mark it had left upon his disciples. Eighty or a hundred years after the death of Jesus there appeared the Gospel of John—written in Ephesus, and, according to the opinion of an increasing number of scholars, by one who had never seen or known Jesus while he lived, being, indeed, only perhaps a hearer of some Apostle. This Gospel tells once more the story of the life of Jesus; but so differently, that in spite of all efforts it is impossible completely to reconcile the fourth Gospel with the three earlier ones. Not merely the events recorded are for the most part different, and the words ascribed to Jesus utterly unlike in manner and matter those recorded in the earlier Gospels, this fourth Gospel begins with a theological prologue that explains the whole purpose

of the work. It is written to show that the Divine Word, 'which was in the beginning with God and was God,' became incarnate in Jesus, the 'Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' All through this Gospel, the being who is called Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God. Without that, this Gospel loses all its meaning. No longer, in this view, is Jesus a man, even an ideal man; he is a manifestation of God. That is a sublime conception certainly, and the author of the Gospel undoubtedly a man of profound spiritual genius. Far greater than those humble disciples who drew the portrait of the Jewish Messiah, and adorned it with quaint legend and homely miracle, the fourth Evangelist was a man of powerful mind, so powerful that he succeeded in creating and imposing on the world a new Christ, whom none had ever seen. Learned in the philosophy of Alexandria, where the doctrine of the Divine Word had long been taught, and filled with a deep reverence for Jesus, the writer whom we call John took the

bold step of identifying him with the Divine Word. That was the explanation he offered of the supreme spiritual greatness of Jesus. And he worked out this idea with splendid power, in a new Gospel. That there is in that Gospel an abundance of magnificent thought, showing a deep knowledge of spiritual truth, I would be the last to deny. But, and this is my point, when all is said and done, what is characteristic in that Gospel belongs not to Jesus but to John. The real Jesus, as we have learnt to know him on his own witness, is, as it seems to me, far other than the Christ of the fourth Gospel. At least, it is safe to say that the real Jesus never gives the slightest hint of his being such as the fourth Gospel describes him. It is not by any means unimportant that the Gospel of John contains no single Parable, nor the Lord's Prayer, nor the Beatitudes, nor any other of the undisputed and indisputable sayings of Jesus. The Christ of the fourth Gospel could not have said them. They belong to a totally different being. And in like

manner the great sayings of the fourth Gospel—and they are very great—belong to a totally different being from what I have called the real Jesus. At most, and in some cases, they are translations of genuine words into the language of a later theology. Confront the fourth Gospel with the real Jesus, and everywhere its conception of Christ is seen to be a theological creation based upon a philosophical theory, and only checked and controlled by a slight and vague traditional remembrance of what Jesus himself had really been. To me, the Christ of the fourth Gospel is an unreal figure, beautiful indeed, and impressive, but not for one moment to be compared with the real Jesus.

John's theory of Christ is, like that of Paul, to be judged on its own merits; and, whether true or not, what it gives us is evidence of the mind of John—not in any degree of the mind of Christ, except so far as it shows us that John felt the greatness of Jesus. Beyond that, the fourth Gospel contributes nothing what-

ever to our knowledge of what Jesus really was; and being as it is the work of one who never met him in his life, cannot be allowed to override the witness of the real Jesus to himself. When I remind you that the whole doctrine of the Incarnation, as it is usually held, depends on the Gospel of John, it will show you that I know what I am doing when I decline to admit the doctrine of Christ taught in that Gospel as adding to our knowledge of the real Jesus. It belongs solely to the theology of John, and throws light upon the Christianity of the second century, not upon its origin in the first.

Holding this position, it will not be necessary for me to speak of those great doctrines of Atonement and Incarnation, for which Paul and John, but not Jesus himself, are responsible. These doctrines have passed into the Christianity of the creeds, and they have the sanction of great names, though not of the greatest. As I do not assail them, so neither do I seek to explain them into harmony with my conception of what Jesus was.

But I may be fairly asked this question : 'If you thus exclude from your conception nine-tenths of what is usually believed about him, what have you got left? Is your "real Jesus" enough to account for what has actually come to pass in history?'

In answer to this question, let me remind you of what I said in trying to describe the man of mighty soul, who lived in perfect sonship to God, and who was ever conscious of his Father's unseen presence. Christian belief regards Jesus as the Revealer of God, and also as the agent in a mysterious transaction done on behalf of mankind, called Atonement. Those two functions, of Revealer and agent in the process of atonement, are quite distinct; and in my conception of Jesus I keep the former and exclude the latter. All that belongs to the doctrine of the God-man, and the part associated to him in the divine dealings with the world, I put aside as having no warrant in that which we know of the real Jesus, and as being based on mere speculations

on the part of Paul and John. But I hold to the conception of Jesus as the Revealer of God, because that is not merely in keeping with the belief in Jesus as a perfect man, but is only possible on that belief. If God reveals himself to all human souls, i.e., makes himself known, as the Father in Heaven whose love to his children is infinite, that revelation can only come through and in a human soul. And the supposed necessity of a God-man to be the means of communication between God and man only arises when God and man are supposed to be *unlike* each other, unable to communicate with each other directly. If this is not so, and if on the other hand man is in his spiritual nature akin to God—made in his image and likeness—then no such mediation is needed, or is even thinkable; and a perfect human soul is the only possible, as it is the best possible, means of revealing the love of the Father and bringing the knowledge of it to the hearts of the children. Jesus, if he had been more than man, would necessarily have

failed to reveal God. As it was, he by the purity of his soul and the vivid intensity of his spiritual life, revealed as none other has ever done the Fatherhood of God as the counterpart of his own perfect sonship. That is what Jesus revealed—the love of God; and in doing so, he also revealed, made known, the highest possibility of human nature, lived the perfect life of God's children. That was what was done by him; and, if some should say that after all this is but a small thing to do, when compared with the greater and more imposing functions ascribed to him in the popular theologies, I would reply that the Fatherhood of God, as revealed by Jesus, is known with a certainty which does not belong to the doctrines of Salvation and Atonement.

The real Jesus, then, was the supreme revealer of God; and he was enabled to be this precisely because he was not himself God.

Then the question remains: 'Is this real Jesus, this purely human personage, enough to account for what has actually

come to pass in history?' And I say boldly, 'Yes.' This real Jesus, this man of mighty soul, whose existence we have proved before ever the earliest Gospel was written, and whose life was ended before Paul made his memorable journey to Damascus—it was this Jesus whose spiritual energy overawed the writers of the early Gospels, fired the soul of Paul, and glowed before the mind of John. The real Jesus was greater than them all; and they own his greatness, and at the same time mark how far they come short of it, by the several conceptions they have given of the Christ, as the Messiah, the Man from Heaven, and the Incarnate Word. These are but echoes of the once living voice, reflected rays of the true light that shone. In Matthew and Mark and Luke, in Paul and in John, we see as in a mirror darkly; in his own disclosure of himself we see the real Jesus face to face, spirit to spirit. If, in the course of history, men have followed the shadow rather than the substance, the image rather than the reality, the Christs of

their theologies rather than the Jesus of actual fact, nevertheless, he it was whose transcendent spiritual power gave rise to these shadows and images of himself.

Jesus revealed God as the Father in Heaven. To him it was simple and natural truth that the Almighty and eternal God, maker of Heaven and earth, should be close to each human soul, an unseen presence of love in every humblest life. So we have learned from Jesus, and according to the measure of our experience we find it true. In like manner it is most simple and natural that the life of the mightiest spirit that ever walked this earth should be that of a poor Galilean teacher, born in a humble home, working for his daily bread, going about doing good in loving ministries of sympathy, speaking words of grace and truth to whoso would listen, the friend of publicans and sinners and of all who had no other friend. Because he was greatest of all God's children, therefore the others cling to him. It was the real Jesus who said 'Suffer the little children to come unto me.'

I believe in Jesus. That is my last word; and I say it with all the strength and energy of conviction that I can put into words. If I may, I would fain be his disciple, and live the daily life of common cares and duties in his spirit of sonship to God. The world may say I am no Christian. I do not look to the world, I look to him. And though, with Peter, I am ready to say, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man O Lord,' with Peter also I will say, 'Lord, to whom shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

I may not worship him. I could not worship him. The Heavenly Father only —Father alike of Jesus and of all other men—him alone can I worship, therein doing what Jesus did. But I look up to Jesus as to the 'great Friend of all the sons of men,' and, in the humble man of Nazareth, discern the unimagined splendour of a perfect soul.

THE BIBLE

Most, if not all, of you have probably heard it said that Unitarians do not read the Bible; or, that they have a Bible of their own, different from the one in ordinary use. Possibly, some of you have felt a slight curiosity to know whether I should read out of a Bible at all, and if I did, whether it would be the same Bible that other Christians use. You will know now that we do use the Bible, the same Bible that is used in other churches. This book that I have in the pulpit is no Unitarian Bible. It is the Revised Version, prepared by order of the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury of the Church of England, and allowed to be used in every parish church in the land. And you may go into any Unitarian chapel

in this kingdom, and you will find in the pulpit the Bible, either in the Authorised or the Revised Version. And, so far as I know, you will not find any other kind of Bible.

As for the popular notion about Unitarians, that they use a different Bible from that which other Christians read, the thing is utterly and entirely false, and it never was true. The charge arose, I believe, in this way. There was published in 1808, I think, a translation of the Bible called the Improved Version. It was the work chiefly of the Rev. Thomas Belsham, at least he was mainly responsible for notes and explanations; the actual text of the translation was for the most part that of Archbishop Newcome. This Improved Version, so far as I know, was never used in a Unitarian pulpit, and never in any sense drove out the regular Authorised Version from Unitarian circles. It was simply an attempt on the part of a few Unitarian scholars, a century ago, to do what Convocation did in our time, i.e., produce a better

translation of the original text of the Scriptures. Belsham and his friends were before their day. They were abused for doing precisely what the Revisers have done, so far as their resources of scholarship allowed. And not only ignorant people, but those who knew better, joined in the outcry against a Unitarian Bible. Nowadays, it is only the ignorant people who keep up the charge. And they are very ignorant indeed.

From these remarks, it will be clear to you (if it was not clear before) that what I have to say refers to *The* Bible, the one that every Christian knows—or ought to know—the only Bible there is. We read it in English, because that is our native tongue; if we were French or German, we should read it in those languages. There are translations in a large number of languages; but the Bible, proper, is that collection of ancient writings, some in Hebrew, some in Greek, from which these translations were made. Those who do not read Hebrew and Greek must, of course, depend on a translation into their

own language. They ought to be very grateful to whosoever will give them a correct translation, or who will give them a more accurate translation than the one they had before. The people who made such an outcry against what they called the Unitarian Bible, said that Mr. Belsham and his friends were tampering with the Word of God. They were doing no such thing ; they were trying to give the meaning in English words of the original Hebrew and Greek, and to do this more correctly than was done in the Authorised Version. And we now use the Revised Version, because we wish to have the best and most reliable English translation of those Hebrew and Greek writings, which it would be scarcely convenient or helpful to have read in the original. The Revisers did their work on the whole very well ; and what they give us is a slightly different translation, but *more of the real Bible than we had before*, i.e., more of the real meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek. The old Authorised Version was a good translation, according to the amount of scholar-

ship available in the year 1611, when it was published. And, of course, its English is magnificent. But a great deal has been learnt since 1611; and a Revised Version was a crying necessity, felt by those at all events who really wanted to know the Bible, and who were aware that it is not an English book. Some people still do not seem to be aware of that.

Everybody knows that the Bible consists of two collections of writings called the Old and the New Testament. The former, which is written in Hebrew, and is much the larger in extent, relates to persons and events connected with the Jewish religion; the latter, written in Greek, is concerned with the origin of the Christian religion, and especially with him who founded that religion. The Old Testament consists, in the English arrangement, of thirty-nine books; the New Testament of twenty-seven. And the name 'Bible,' which covers them all, is formed from a Greek word, and merely denotes 'Books.'

The Old Testament writings extend

over a period of a thousand years, more or less. Those of the New Testament were all composed within two centuries, probably a good deal less.

It is a common practice, in a lecture on the Bible, to give a rapid summary of the general history contained in it, beginning with the Patriarchs and coming down to the Apostles. Instead of conforming to that practice, I will start at the other end and work backwards; i.e., I shall begin with the Bible as we have it—a collection of writings, and inquire how it came to be a collection, who collected it, and why they collected it. By taking this course, I follow the line of least resistance.

The whole Bible was finally stamped with the seal of the Church, and pronounced to be Canonical[1] Scripture, by a decree of the Council of Carthage in the year 397. That date may surprise you. It means that the Church had not

[1] 'Canonical' means 'belonging to the Canon'; and 'Canon' means a list drawn up and approved by authority.

fully made up its mind what was, and what was not, to be received as Holy Scripture, until nearly four hundred years after the birth of Christ. The uncertainty was in regard to the New Testament. The Old Testament was taken bodily over from the Jewish religion, as part of the inheritance claimed by Christianity. But in regard to the New Testament, although the several writings which we now find there had long been in existence, when the Canon was finally fixed, yet they had not all been received without question into the collections of Holy Scripture made earlier than 397. The four Gospels were always received. So also were the Acts of the Apostles, and the Pauline Epistles. But in some quarters, the Epistle to the Hebrews was rejected; in others, the Epistle of James; in others, the Second Epistle of Peter, the Second and Third of John, the Epistle of Jude, and the Apocalypse. And not only so, but other books, not now found in the New Testament, were at various times and in various parts of the Church regarded as

Holy Scripture. Such were the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistles of Clement, and the book called the Shepherd of Hermas. So that, until the year 397, there was no final agreement as to what did, and what did not, belong to the authoritative Canon of Christian Scripture. And if the New Testament is held to be the inspired and infallible Word of God, then the Council of Carthage finally decided that certain books were, and others were not, inspired and infallible. A most weighty and momentous decision, surely! But the grounds of that decision were not the character of the several books, but the amount of general favour in which they were held, owing to their age and usage. It was a case of drawing the line somewhere; and between those books which were only just let in, and those which were only just shut out, there was no marked difference of quality.

What was finally admitted into the Canon was thus only a part of a much more extensive literature beginning with the Epistles of Paul and the earliest Gospels.

Out of these, collections were gradually made of what seemed to be the best ; and the others were allowed to fall out of notice and be forgotten. Finally, one collection was approved as the standard one, and all others condemned. If the New Testament writings really are the infallible word of God, to the exclusion of all others, it seems strange that the final severance of the true from the false should have been left to the chances and accidents of nearly four hundred years. If you tell me that the Divine Providence controlled the process at every step, I do not presume to deny, because I do not know. But it seems curious that Divine Providence should have allowed so much doubt to exist for so long upon a point of such vital importance ; and I cannot help thinking that the process, as it really went on, is very much like what would have gone on if there were no special over-ruling and controlling Providence in the case, but only the ordinary ways of pious and intelligent men.

Now we will go a step further back.

Where did those writings come from that were included in the Canon of Scripture? They certainly were not published in the manner in which books are published nowadays. The letters of Paul, for example, were addressed to one or other of seven churches, and to certain private individuals. Copies of the letters no doubt would be written out and circulated for the benefit of other groups of readers; and probably a collection of them would gradually be formed, as Paul was, of course, a very well-known man. The four Gospels also were circulated in every church. But the other writings were less generally known; they only slowly made their way into general use from the particular church where they were first read; and no certain knowledge was to be had of their authorship or their date. No one knows who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, or the Epistle of Jude, or the Second of Peter, in spite of the names attached to them. They are fragments of early Christian literature, whose origin is unknown.

The Gospels are an earlier case of the same kind. The latest of the four indeed can be traced with more success than the other three. It was written in or near Ephesus, probably between the years 110 and 140 A.D.; and its author, according to an opinion which I believe to be well-founded, was not John the Apostle, but a certain John the Presbyter. This Gospel does not profess to be a collection of traditions about Jesus, but a life of him from a definite theological point of view. The earlier Gospels bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are distinctly collections of traditions about Jesus, and most valuable they are. The writer of the third Gospel, in his opening sentence, tells how he took pains to get information from those who from the beginning were eye witnesses. No doubt the writers of the other two Gospels did much the same. It is plain to see that all three writers have drawn upon the same general mass of tradition concerning Jesus, taking what their informants could tell them, and thankful to get that if they could get no

more. What they did get was what had been repeated by word of mouth for at least thirty years before it was written down; and who said it, or what authority they had for saying it, is unknown, and was unknown long before the Canon of the Gospels was fixed. The reason why these collections were made of traditions about Jesus is easy to understand. When those who had seen and heard him one by one died, and when the Church in Jerusalem was broken up in the year 68 by the impending war, it was plainly necessary to write down all that could then be remembered of the words of Jesus and of the things he did, lest they should be wholly lost. Our Gospels are three separate attempts to do this; and what they contain is all that remains of the much fuller Jesus-tradition that once existed.

Now let us go back another step, and pass from the New Testament to the Old. The Hebrew Scriptures (in a Greek translation) were, as I said, taken bodily over into the use of the Christian Church, and

that from the very beginning. Paul very often refers to the Old Testament, as do the other writers. And whenever you find in the New Testament a reference to 'the Scriptures,' it is the Old Testament that is meant. Thus, in the famous text (2 Tim. iii. 16), which is commonly quoted in the form 'Every Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for teaching,' etc., the reference cannot be to the New Testament, for that was not in existence when the words were written. At most it refers to the Old Testament. [The text should, however, be rendered 'Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching' etc. So the Revised Version gives it.]

The Canon of the Old Testament was practically closed as early as the time of Paul, and it included the books which we now find there, and no others. Those writings known as the Apocrypha are found not in the Hebrew but in the Greek version, which was used by Jews living out of Palestine. They have come down into Christian usage chiefly through the

Latin; and because they were not part of the Hebrew Bible, they have never been reckoned as Holy Scripture. Now the Hebrew Bible is in its turn a collection of writings, or rather a group of collections made at different times. There was the collection called the Law, i.e., the first five books, ascribed to Moses; then the collection of the prophets, including Joshua and all the historical books except Chronicles, but not including Daniel. And there was a third collection, comprising what was written after the books already mentioned, i.e., Daniel, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The book of Psalms is a collection by itself, and represents the Hymn-book of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, and still more, the Hymn-book of the Synagogue. The songs it contains are of various date, and their authorship is unknown. It is very doubtful if David wrote a single one of the Psalms; there is certainly nothing to prove that he did. In like manner the authorship of the

other writings in this miscellaneous group is unknown; only the book of Nehemiah, one of the most interesting books in the Old Testament, contains a good deal of what appears to be Nehemiah's own memoranda.

Those who finally settled the Canon of the Hebrew Scriptures, thus made a collection of all the writings which by gradual usage had met with most general acceptance, and they exercised their judgment in making their selection. They hesitated over Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. And they rejected the books now known as the Apocrypha.

The collection of the Prophetical books (including the histories) was made only gradually, but was completed long before the fixing of the Canon. The historical books take us a great way back in the history of the Jews; and they contain traditions handed down through centuries, repeated, altered, edited and re-edited, and gradually shaped into their present form. There is a great deal of reliable information to be got out of these books;

but they come to us from unknown writers, and they are only a survival from a larger literature of which the rest is lost.

What we know as the Prophetical books, called by the names of certain men, do contain a large amount of the actual writings of these men. Isaiah was a real personage, and a very great man; so was Jeremiah, so was Ezekiel. Hosea, Joel, Amos, and the rest of the so-called minor prophets, were also real men; and what they said or wrote, or some of it, is still to be read in their books. Yet these books again are collections, and they contain, besides the genuine words of the prophet whose name they bear, other prophecies of unknown authorship. Thus the book of Isaiah contains the work of Isaiah himself, also that of a great prophet usually called the second Isaiah, who lived two centuries later; also a number of fragments from other prophecies of unknown authorship. Whoever edited the book of Isaiah collected all these together, and, so to speak, put them for safety under the protection of a great name.

The same is true of the writings of the minor prophets, and to a less degree of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And the object of the whole collection of historical and prophetical writings was obviously the desire to preserve all that was still to be found of the old literature, after the grievous damage done to it by the disaster of the Captivity.

If we turn now to the so-called books of Moses, known as the Law, or the Pentateuch, we have the same thing over again, namely, a collection of more or less ancient traditions, some of them extremely ancient. The Pentateuch was completed, or virtually completed, by Ezra in the fifth century B.C.; and what he did was to incorporate with the mass of later material the much older book of Deuteronomy, and a still more ancient collection of traditions, compiled probably in the ninth or eighth centuries. Here we get to the far end of our backward journey through the Bible; and standing on the frontiers of historical knowledge we look over a dim expanse of myth and legend,

and the view is bounded by the absolutely unknown.

The whole Bible, then, from Genesis to Revelation, represents a series of survivals, selections, collected fragments, made at various times, and in almost every case by unknown persons. It is a certain fact, that there was once a number of writings, historical and other, which are now lost. What remains, i.e., what we now have in the Bible, is of priceless value, whatever view one takes of the inspiration of the Bible. But my point is (and it is for the sake of it that I have made this perhaps rather tedious survey of the growth of the Bible) that the whole of what is now regarded as Holy Scripture is the outcome of successive attempts to preserve what was in danger of being lost, and what was deemed valuable. Do not suppose that I demur to the title of Holy Scripture, or that I think lightly of the pious labours of those who collected it gradually together, or of the value of what they have given to posterity. There is no more sublime collection of religious writings to

be found in all the literatures of the world. And the men who have gathered up the fragments and have gradually built up the Bible, deserve the deep gratitude of all succeeding ages. Less great than the men whose words they treasured up—the prophets, the apostles, and the One above all who 'spake as never man spake'—these unknown recorders and collectors and arrangers did faithful service, and cared not for renown. We know not their names; but it is well to remember that amongst them are some that we have heard of. For the whole treasure of the Old Testament, its histories, its prophecies, its Psalms, the growth of a nation's religion for more than a thousand years, comes to us through the labours of the Scribes—those much abused men, who, with the Pharisees, have been the mark for centuries of undeserved and ignorant Christian scorn.

So far as we have yet gone, I do not see the necessity of calling in any theory of Divine control over, or interference with, the process of collecting together the

contents of the Bible. What we see is only the natural working of ordinary human minds. The particular choice of some writings and rejection of others, may, of course, have been due to immediate Divine guidance; but there is nothing to show that it was so. And until some evidence can be brought forward in support of such a theory, we are not at liberty to assume it. Whatever, then, may be the case, in regard to the inspiration of the several writings of the Bible, there is no evidence to show that the Bible as a whole assumed its collective form as the result of inspiration.

Let us turn to the actual contents of the Bible—the books themselves which compose it—and take one or two samples. Take the Book of Ezekiel, for example, which is the work of one man, a great and well-known prophet. He lived during the time of the Captivity, i.e., in the sixth century B.C., and he himself was one of the captives. His book contains a series of addresses to his countrymen, upon their religious duties and their religious

defects, by one who was a severe and unsparing rebuker of low morality and corrupt religion. He regards himself always as a messenger of God, and says that the word of the Lord came to him, bidding him 'speak to the children of Israel, and say to them,' etc. Nothing is more certain than that to Ezekiel religion was a most vivid reality; God did most surely rule the nations upon earth, and his hand was to be seen in the events which happened to them. The captivity was, in Ezekiel's view, the punishment for previous national sin against the national God. In like manner, he saw in the fate of other nations the decree of God executed against them or in their favour. Ezekiel was a deep thinker, and accustomed to take wide views over the world and its history, so far as he knew them. His book abounds with proofs of the close attention with which he observed the political events of his time, and interpreted them from the point of view of religion. He was a great man, and holds a high place in the ranks of those

who have brought religion into close relation with human life; and although to most readers he appears to be stern and forbidding, yet few will question the nobility of his character. Ezekiel was a most real man, and wrote himself out plain to be seen on every page of his book. He used the language of his time and country, and uttered thoughts which also belong to that time and country. I know that he was one of the leaders of thought, who showed to his people the next step in their religious and moral advance. But all he says is based upon the state of things which actually existed in his time, and his own range of thought and knowledge is bounded by the conditions of his life as a Jew, in the beginning of the sixth century. There is, so far as I see, no sign that he possessed any knowledge of future events beyond what was attainable by the ordinary powers of a human mind—in his case, certainly, a great mind. In one of his addresses, speaking in the name of the Lord, he says that the great heathen city of Tyre shall be destroyed. 'Thus

saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against thee, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers: I will also scrape the dust from her, and make her a bare rock' (Ezekiel xxvi. 3–4). There is a definite prediction, spoken in the name of and by command of God, so the prophet says; and he gives the year and the day, when the word of the Lord came to him. Is not this, you will say, a clear case of knowledge of future events, beyond what was attainable by the ordinary powers of a human mind? It would be, perhaps, if this prediction had been fulfilled; but it was not fulfilled, and, what is more, Ezekiel himself admits that it was not fulfilled. Tyre was besieged, by Nebuchadnezzar; but that great soldier did not capture the city, and had to leave it without the rich plunder he had hoped for. Ezekiel frankly admits this, and says so in chap. xxix. 17–20. All this is natural enough in a man possessing no

miraculous knowledge of the future; it is merely the honest acknowledgment of a mistake. How it is to be explained, if Ezekiel was really inspired by God with a knowledge of future events, I leave to those who may hold that view.

The Book of Ezekiel, then, shows us the work of a prophet, a religious teacher, speaking the language and thinking the thoughts conditioned by the time and place in which he lived. And the same thing is true of the other prophetical books. Indeed, it is true of the whole Bible. Everywhere, you read the words of those who were men of their time, i.e., who were not divided by wide differences of moral and intellectual culture from those to whom they spoke. The prophets spoke to the people with whom they lived, to rebuke them or teach them; the questions they pondered and tried to answer, were the questions which were then of pressing importance—not the questions which should arise only centuries after their time. It is, indeed, this which makes the Bible so full of human interest, and

so full of good teaching as it is. It would not be so, if we thought that the prophets, while they appeared to be speaking about the events of their own day, were really speaking of things to happen four or five hundred years afterwards. But there is no necessity whatever to put such a forced interpretation upon the writings which we find in the Bible. Those who wrote them, or spoke the words contained in them, whether prophet or priest or psalmist, were men of their time, and can only be fully understood in connexion with their time. The man who wrote the noble chapter with which the Bible opens —the story of the creation of the world— is wholly misjudged, unless he be regarded as a man of his time. And his time was one in which scientific knowledge did not exist, either in regard to astronomy or geology or physics or zoology, or any other kindred branch of learning. The first chapter of Genesis is contradicted by the results of these sciences, as they are now studied; and if you say that the writer of the Creation story was Moses, and that

he was divinely instructed concerning the way in which the world was created, then you have to face the difficulty that a divinely-inspired record is at variance with an ever-increasing body of well-established facts. You may (I don't know) prefer to stand by the record, and defy the facts. But, in that case, I should think you would feel that if God really had given to mankind, through Moses, an inspired account of how the world was created, he had made it less convincing than was desirable.

Is it not much more natural, yes and much more in accord with a due reverence towards God, to say that the writer of the creation story wrote as a man of his time, holding such ideas about the earth and sun and moon and stars as were current in his time? and that he, holding such ideas, wrote a hymn of praise to God the Creator? Looked at in this way, the Creation chapter in Genesis is still a noble utterance of religion; and we can read it as such, and learn from it, without being troubled by the fact that the writer of it was neither a Newton nor a Darwin.

In like manner, of the much older stories in Genesis, about the Garden of Eden, about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, ancient legends and myths from the very early days of the Hebrew nation, it is again much more natural to look upon the recorders of these stories as men of their time, holding very simple and child-like ideas about God and his ways of dealing with men, than to say that they were divinely inspired recorders of an infallible revelation from God. There is, at all events, nothing to suggest such divine inspiration in the records of early religious belief to be found in the Old Testament. There is only what one would expect to find in the early stages of the religious growth of a nation. And looked at from this point of view, the whole Bible becomes full of human interest, as I said, a real live book, instead of a bewildering series of chapters where everything is alike divine and true, and the ordinary distinctions of good, bad, and indifferent are lost in a general haze of holiness.

So far then as we have yet gone, there is no necessity to call in any theory of special divine control over or interference with either the collections of the several books which form the Bible, or with the writing of them. There is no evidence of anything more than the ordinary powers of mind of pious and intelligent men, some of them men of very great gifts as leaders of thought and teachers of religion, some of them by no means great. If we judge them each as a man of his time, learn what he was and what he did in the circumstances in which he lived and worked, i.e., if we read their words just for what they tell us, and not with reference to future events and later ideas of religion which were unknown to them, then, and I believe only then, do we rightly understand where lies the inspiration that is to be found in the Bible—that in it, which makes it indeed Holy Scripture.

Inspiration is the influence of God upon the soul of man; and its effect is to quicken the powers of the soul, to rouse

it, and kindle in it a more than usual glow of zeal and devotion. The effect is not to communicate knowledge of facts, but to make a man feel with more than usual intensity the real presence of God with him. This is, I believe, what the prophets meant when they said the word of the Lord came to them. It was the touch of the spirit of God upon their spirit, the strong and clear consciousness that he was there, and that they were brought very near to him. This is a real fact of religious experience ; and the lives of all the great religious teachers from Jesus downwards bear witness to the truth of it. If God be, and always has been, the Father of human souls, there is nothing strange or difficult to believe in the thought that he should be close to each human soul, spirit to spirit ; and if so, there is nothing strange or hard to believe in the thought that he makes his presence felt, with more than usually vivid intensity, in such souls as he chooses to be his revealers and his messengers. That is the prophetic word of the Lord that comes. And it does

come. If now the prophet, or other true man of God, think, or speak, or write, while his soul is thus full of the presence of God, his thoughts and his words will bear witness of that divine presence. He will not, indeed, cease to be a man of his time, speaking the language and bound by the conditions of his time ; the Jew of the seventh century will remain a seventh century Jew, and will not be carried in spirit to the first Christian century or to the twentieth. But he will be the living witness of the living God to his own time ; he will speak to his own countrymen of the things which concern them, and show them by the light that has shone in his soul that God is with him, and therefore he speaks. The prophet's words are his own, the result of his own intellectual and moral powers. What he says may prove to be mistaken, or be set aside by some later utterance from some more enlightened mind. The words of the prophets are what we read in the Bible, the things which they said and did when most strongly ' moved by the Holy Spirit.'

And it is *through* their words, not *in* their words, that we also feel the quickening touch of the spirit of God. Therein lies the power of a prophetic word for all time.

The history of the times of Ezekiel is nothing to us. But yet to us Ezekiel is a man of God, if we feel, as we read his ancient book, that in the soul of that man God made his presence strongly felt. It matters nothing at all that Ezekiel was sometimes mistaken in the opinions he formed about the events of his day. The man had a great soul; and the light of God shone in it, and shines still in the words that were born of that soul.

So all the way through the Bible, though its histories be of times and people dead and gone, though its knowledge be but a scanty store compared with the accumulation of late centuries, still there glows in its pages the light of the presence of God as real men once really felt it. All this belongs to actual experience; and while it implies, above everything else, a direct and close communion between God and man, it does not imply any special over-

ruling of the ordinary powers of mind belonging to man as man. The Bible is, from first to last, a record of personal and religious experience, under every variety of circumstances. And it is the witness of a real inspiration, a real influence of God upon man, of every degree of intensity, from the highest as it was in Jesus, till it vanishes altogether at the dead level of what is merely dull and commonplace, as you may find it in the catalogues of the names in the books of Chronicles, and the dukes of Edom in Genesis xxxvi.

To say that the whole Bible is everywhere and equally inspired is an abuse of terms, and is the sure way to the conclusion that it is not inspired at all. Inspiration does not belong to the book, or to the words of the book; but was a reality in the souls of some of the men whose words we read there. To take the whole as in every part equally inspired, infallible, given by God for the express instruction of men, is to incur the necessity of believing that, amongst other things, murder, robbery, and falsehood

have been sanctioned by God. To regard the whole as a miraculous record of revelation, to be accepted as in every part the word of God to man, is to force the conclusion that the men of the Bible were not under the same conditions as we are, that things happened then that do not happen now, that religion was in some way easier to them than it is to us, that they lived in days when angels came bringing messages from God, when miracles were done—miracles some of which mock all attempts to understand them, and which, if true, prove the intellectual advance of the last two thousand years to be a delusion and a sham.

You cannot cut the Bible off from its living roots in human life, and put it by itself as a thing divine, without doing fatal injury to it. So treated, exalted by undiscerning veneration to be the one final revelation of God, it becomes neither human nor divine, but a dead *thing*, which men bow to, as if it were an idol or a fetish.

The divine and the human are always

found together; and God, though he be Lord of all the worlds, is only known in human souls. All revelation of him, whether in the great works of his creation, or in the long drama of history or in the varied experiences of individual lives, is a revelation in the mind and soul of him to whom it comes. The Bible is the record of how such revelations came in many forms and with growing clearness in the lives of an ancient people. It is the record of human experience by the men who had that experience. And as we read the long story that is unfolded in the Bible, we can see, not only how that gradual revelation was made, till it reached its full and perfect height in Jesus, but also how in so many lives, under such varied conditions, the presence of God and his power were felt as reality, not as mere creation of a pious fancy. That is what gives unity to the Bible, and gathers its several parts into one body of Holy Scripture. That is what makes the Bible of undying power, and of inestimable value as a book of religion. And that can

be neither destroyed nor injured by the Higher Criticism, as it is called, which is only feared by those who do not see that what is divine in the Bible is not in the letter but in the spirit of it. What the critics have done, and are doing, is to reconstruct the history, the outward circumstances amidst which the religious experience was obtained that is recorded in the Bible. And the effect of doing this is to restore the Bible to its true place as a human book, to be loved and cherished for its own sake as the noblest fruit of the religious nature of man, not the dictated infallible word of God to man, but the witness of the greatest of men to God. The Bible is a book to be studied freely and fearlessly. It shows a truer respect to the Bible to use one's best thought upon it, find out what its various writings contain, to observe and learn from its contradictions, its limitations, its wonderful variety of detail, to trace the growth of a gradual revelation made in diverse portions and in diverse manners—I say it shows a truer

respect to the Bible to study it thus, than to treat it as a God-given oracle whose every word is truth and to which we must submit our reason and our conscience, or as an armoury of texts to be flung about as if they were indeed the thunderbolts of heaven. It is vain to try and silence the questionings of the earnest mind to-day with the arguments of the first century, or to build up one's religion on an apostle's interpretation of an ancient Hebrew myth. It is vain to build up a set of doctrines and say—This is the teaching of the Bible. The Bible speaks through many voices, not through one; and the voices make a harmony, not a unison. The harmony is not that of intellectual statement, or doctrinal uniformity—anything but that; the harmony is of religious experience, faith in God, deepening into assured trust in him, rising into devout love to him, a growing knowledge of the ways of his Providence, a deeper insight into the close relation to him of the souls which he has created.

So we read the Bible, and learn how

men thought of God in days of old; how they lived their lives, as we have to live ours, by the light and help of such trust in him as they possessed. We read of all manner of events, meet with all manner of persons, good and bad; see the religious life presented from every possible point of view; and the lesson to be learnt from it all—so far as one can truly speak of one lesson summing up all that the Bible means for us now—one great lesson, at all events, is taught by all that we read there, one message echoed by all the many voices of those men of old—'O ye of the latest days, God is with you as he was with us; we in our time, as you in yours, had our trials and temptations, our sorrows and our joys, our days of toil and hours of ease. Trust in him as we did, and you shall find, as we found, that he is a refuge and strength; he is our light and our salvation, the strength of our life, and our portion for ever.'

Such is the teaching of the Bible for us of this present day, and for the generations to come. God fulfils himself in many

ways, and has spoken through other than Hebrew and Greek lips. No nation of the world has he left without a witness of himself. But the Bible is the record of his revelation to those from whom we have learnt; and as we read in its pages, we discern yet the glow and glory of God that shone in the souls of prophet and saint—the true inspiration that makes the Bible, indeed, Holy Scripture. And, with a far higher thought of God than as a mere dictator of ancient words, with a faith in him as the living God, who has not spoken his last word eighteen centuries ago, and shut up his revelation in the two covers of a book, we may gratefully thank him that in the course of his providence the Bible came to be written; and make it our prayer, as we close the book in which we have read of noble lives that were lived in the days of old, 'The Lord God be with us, as he was with our fathers.'

THE CHURCH

The preceding lecture was upon a subject in regard to which all Christians are agreed on at least one point. The Bible is a definite object, a certain collection of writings, so many in number, containing such and such statements. Opinions may vary to any extent as to the way in which the Bible ought to be interpreted, etc.; but there is no difference of opinion as to what is referred to, when the Bible is named. There is only one Bible.

When, however, we speak of the Church, there is no such general agreement. Not only do different people mean different things, when they speak of the Church; but the same person may use the word in several different senses. By 'the Church'

may be meant a building for worship This is a church, where we are now assembled; though, I think, most of us like to keep to the old name of 'chapel.' At all events, it is a place of worship. By 'the Church,' may be meant the people who usually meet in such a building, as the regular congregation. Or, again, 'the Church' may mean any number of congregations, forming parts of one large organism, upon the basis of some agreement in doctrine and practice. The 'Free Churches,' mean the great Nonconformist bodies—though I believe it is not correct to speak of the whole community of Baptists as 'the Baptist Church.' The Church of England is a great religious organism, including a large number of members, and possessing a highly elaborate constitution, and is undoubtedly 'A Church,' whether or not it be 'The Church.' The same is true, in an even greater degree, of the Roman Catholic Church.

Further, the term 'Church' is used to denote the whole body of Christians

throughout the world, apart from all sectarian distinctions. And this inclusive use of the word only suffers from the want of an agreement upon the question, What is a Christian ?

So many-sided is the meaning of the word Church. What I shall try to do, is to get to the root from which all these meanings have sprung, the initial fact which became, historically, so important that all these various meanings are recognized parts of Christian thought. The source of all is to be found in the New Testament ; and beyond any question, the cause of it all was the ministry of Jesus. If he had not lived when he did, and been what he was, there would have been no Church, in any sense. We have, therefore, to inquire what was the beginning of the Church, and what was the relation of Jesus to it.

Of all religious institutions bearing the name of Church, from the great Roman Catholic communion down to the smallest and most insignificant sect, the source and origin is the band of disciples who

remained, like sheep without a shepherd, after the death of Jesus. In what they did, when left to themselves, is to be seen the first feeble and hesitating step of what was to be a long and triumphant march down the centuries—the advance of 'an exceeding great army,' bearing on its banner the name of Christ. Striking as is the difference between the later and the earlier aspects of that organized Christianity called the Church—a difference so great as almost to render impossible the belief that the one is the result of the other—the course of historical development can, nevertheless, be traced from the assembly of the disciples in their room in Jerusalem to the imperial splendour of the Church of Rome; from the one community, knowing no differences, to the multitude of divergent and often hostile Protestant sects. An unbroken thread of historical continuity unites each one to the original band of disciples. And even those, such as Unitarians, who are frequently regarded as heretics and outcasts, have, nevertheless

their share in the great history which is the common inheritance of Christendom.

What, then, was the beginning of this mighty movement? I mean, what was the first step taken by the disciples, as distinguished from anything that Jesus may or may not have done? Of that, I will speak presently. A first step, there must have been; but of anything like the conscious and intentional foundation of an institution expected to become great, there is not a trace.

Naturally, the leaders among the disciples were those eleven whom Jesus had himself chosen. Judas was no longer with them. There were, besides the eleven, a number of others, both men and women—all those who had been personal followers of Jesus. The Book of Acts says there were about one hundred and twenty of them; which is probable enough, though the Book of Acts is not a very safe guide. The disciples, left without a leader, would naturally cling together; and probably they spent their time chiefly in a sort of prayer meeting,

calling to mind what Jesus had been to them, and musing upon the strange events that had come to pass.

In those days, says the Book of Acts, Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, and spoke of Judas who had been the betrayer. He had been chosen by Jesus as an Apostle ; but had forfeited his place, and had since died. Peter proposed that the vacancy should be filled up. 'Of the men, therefore, which companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection.' And they put forward two, and cast lots between them ; praying that God, (or perhaps Christ), would make known which of the two he had chosen 'to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away.' The Book of Acts is a late book, and as I said not always a safe guide. It is possible, therefore, that what is stated in the first chapter, about the election of Matthias in place of Judas, is not historical. However, I am willing to admit

the story, as it seems in itself reasonable and probable. The importance of it is this: the vacant place of Judas would not have been filled up, unless it had been felt that there was something more to be done by the disciples than merely to keep together. That filling of the vacant place was the first step taken by the disciples as a community, their first corporate act. Up till then, they had been individual disciples of Jesus, bound to each other by their devotion to him. Henceforth they were members of a society, although they may have had very vague ideas of the work which that society would have to do. If we may trust the account in Acts, the duty of the Apostles was to bear witness of the resurrection of Jesus. Such is always the purpose assigned in the New Testament to the preaching of the Apostles. Whether in filling up the place of Judas, there was a definite idea of preaching, i.e., of going about and making known the resurrection of Jesus, cannot be determined; but is not of great importance. Within no

long time there was such a purpose, and the Apostles were not merely witnesses, who could tell about Jesus if they were asked, but messengers to go and tell what they knew to such as would hear. They appear to have begun by what we should call holding services in their meeting-room, and by teaching in the Temple, very much as Jesus himself had done. The Book of Acts describes, in the well-known story of Pentecost, what is meant for the official inauguration (if I may venture to use such a term in this connexion) of the Christian Church. The story bears plain witness to a date long after the alleged event; the writer evidently did not know what 'speaking with tongues' meant, and has in all innocence constructed upon that phrase a miracle story which can scarcely be equalled in the New Testament for its utter defiance of reason. That any such event ever took place as that suggested in this amazing story, can only be believed by those for whom the Bible is its own authority, not to be questioned or

criticized. But the purpose of the writer is plain, or part of it. He wished to show how the Christian society was consecrated for its work by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and how its work was to be the preaching of Christianity to all nations. When the Christian society first became conscious that such was its work and such its consecration, then it became the Christian Church. But that that took place on Pentecost, or at any other specific time, needs far stronger evidence than the second chapter of Acts. Probably it was not until after Paul had carried the Gospel to the Gentiles, that the representatives of the original Christian society made a virtue of necessity, and recognized that Christianity could not be kept amongst the Jews, and that the Christian Church must go forth and spread amongst the heathen.

Of the Christian Church as a 'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,' the real founder and chief organizer was Paul. If it had not been for him, the world might never have heard the name of Christ. At most there might have been some

mention of a peculiar sect of Jews, who thought the Messiah had come, and who were to be found in and about Jerusalem during the first century. Paul would have nothing of such hole-and-corner Christianity, and he spent his life, from the time he became a Christian, in travelling as a missionary, founding communities of Christians wherever he could. These were churches and also parts of the Church. Paul helped them to organize themselves under some simple form of management; and his letters still contain many directions and hints for the practical conduct of the affairs of churches.

Whatever it had been before Paul appeared, after his time the Christian Church was a society whose members were to be found in many lands, and of many languages, owning a common belief that Christ had risen from the dead, and a general allegiance to him as the spiritual head of the Church. Paul, 'as a wise master-builder,' had laid the foundations, and many others helped to build thereon the structure of the Christian Church.

The various regulations that were made, for the management of local churches and their relations to one another as parts of the Church, were evidently the result of the needs of the time. They were adopted as occasion arose, and as the good sense of the leaders suggested. The Church had no pattern to imitate, and no specific directions to carry out. What had to be done everywhere was to make provision for the religious wants of Christians by worship and teaching, and also to make converts where possible by extending the knowledge of Christianity. In regard to worship, the Christian practice from the beginning seems to have followed that of the Jewish synagogue, in whose services there were the elements of hymn, prayer, lesson, and sermon, to which we are accustomed. The Jewish Scriptures were also taken over into Christian use, as I explained in the previous lecture. Teaching was naturally the duty of those who had either founded the particular community, or had been most closely associated with such founder—those, at

all events, who were in communication with the leaders of other churches, and with those who knew most of the original teaching of Paul and the other Apostles. It was by a sort of natural necessity that the organization of the local Christian communities should gradually take the form of a flock under one shepherd; and we see, with no surprise, the government of the community pass from the hands of the chosen elders into the hands of the chief elder, whose original title of 'Overseer' has, in its Greek form, become permanent in the word 'Bishop.' From this point the development is easy to follow: the Bishop, or overseer, of the strongest church in a district, would naturally be appealed to in connexion with the weaker churches, and would gradually exercise control over a number of such churches. In like manner a chief Bishop would, in time, take the lead and hold a sort of authority over the lesser Bishops; and the logical result was attained when the Bishop of Rome came to be acknowledged as head over all the other Bishops, and as

therefore the head of the Church, the Vicar of Christ upon earth.

I have no intention of giving even the barest outline of the history of the Church, not only because to do so would be utterly impossible in the time (even if I had the requisite knowledge), but because the history of the church is no real part of my present subject. The point I want to make clear just now is this: that the Christian society became the Church, not of set purpose, nor out of a clear conception of its future task, but from the pressure of day-to-day necessity. The first disciples were conscious that they must keep together, as witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, and must do something to make known the great truth which was in their possession. As their numbers increased, forms of management and conditions of membership came into use, one might almost say, spontaneously. Things done on the spur of the moment gradually became customs; and customs became time-honoured rules, not to be lightly set aside. When the Church awoke

to the full consciousness that it *was* the Church, the main lines of its constitution were already laid down, its future course of development marked out; and to retrace its steps, even if that had been thought desirable, was impossible. From that time on, the Christian Church, as an institution fraught with immense capabilities of good and of evil, went on its way; and in the centuries that have since elapsed it has, both in good and evil, richly fulfilled the promise of its youth.

Judged as a human institution there is nothing surprising, however deplorable, in the fact that evil as well as good has attended the progress of the Christian Church. Its task of converting the world brought it into necessary and close contact with things that were the reverse of Christian; and, having to touch pitch, its hands were defiled therewith. The worldly spirit, the temper and mind of unredeemed selfishness in all its forms, made its way into the Christian Church, and mounted even to the throne of the Popes, presenting at last to the horrified

gaze of all decent people that spectacle of consecrated iniquity summed up in the name of Borgia. Even this is intelligible in a human institution, the work of ordinary men, i.e., men of not more than human powers of mind, and not under any special divine control. How such things should be possible, let alone intelligible, in an institution supposed to be divine, supposed to be always under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, I confess myself unable to see. Again, it is nothing surprising, however deplorable, that when Protestantism appeared and rent the Roman Church in two, it should split one-half of it into countless fragments of more or less hostile sects. This is intelligible, if the Church, thus transformed, was a wholly human institution, and the reconstituted churches also human, every one of them. But that also is scarcely intelligible if the Church was divine, and any of its subsequent fragments divine, except so far as all that is good in human life and thought and work has something divine in it.

Judged as human, from the beginning until now, i.e., not recognizing any special divine control except such as is implied in the fact of great spiritual genius in the persons of its chief characters, the history of the Christian Church is the history of a great and far-reaching influence for good in the life of the human race. We can pay honour and reverence to its saints and heroes, and fitly condemn its criminals and its shameless reprobates. We can see it decide for the doctrine of one nature in Christ by the force of riot and bloodshed, and are not bound to admit that the Holy Spirit of God presided over the Council of Ephesus. We can recognize that the leaders of its thought and the directors of its policy were men, and judge them accordingly. And we can see in its developments of doctrine and divergences of practice not the sin of schism, but the natural result of human thought intent on using its own power, and only slowly learning to know its limitations and its true self-control.

But the history of the Christian Church

regarded as a miraculously guided divine institution, is to me an utter denial of all that I can acknowledge as the Providence of God. As with the Bible, so with the Church, the divine treasure is contained in an earthen vessel of unmistakeably human manufacture.

You will have noticed that I have dated the origin of the Christian Church, as known to history, from the Apostles and other disciples, and have found the real beginning of it in the first act which they performed as members of a society, namely, the choice of one to take the place of Judas. And the conclusion I have so far reached is that the Church was not founded by the Apostles, but grew naturally by force of circumstances.

The question now is, 'What was the relation of Jesus to the movement begun by his disciples after his death? Did he really found the Church? Is that institution, whose origin has been described, and whose nature has been briefly hinted at, the carrying out of the idea which was in the mind of Jesus when he spoke of

the Church? If not, then what did he mean by the Church?' In those questions I mark out the line to be followed in the remainder of this lecture.

It is a significant fact, that no record has been preserved of any directions given by Jesus for the organization of the Church. That may be taken as conclusive proof that he never gave such directions; for if those who organized the Church had been able to quote any ostensible command or ordinance of his, bearing upon the formation and constitution of a society to be called by his name, we may be quite sure they would have quoted it. The wonder is, that some such commands or directions were not invented and ascribed to him. It is possible, indeed, that one such was invented: the passage in Matt. xviii. 17, where it is said that when a brother sins, and will not listen to reproof, 'tell it unto the Church, and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican.' But, even admitting this to be genuine, there is here hardly more

than a bare allusion to the Church; and there is nothing else in all the Gospels which can be called a direction or command or instruction upon the subject of the formation of the Church. The disciples may have tried to carry out what they thought he would have wished; but they had no direct word to which to appeal. Their first act, as I have already mentioned, was to appoint a successor in the place of Judas—one who should exercise his ministry and apostleship. A most important office and a most important choice, for what authority there was belonged naturally to the Apostles, after Jesus was gone. But they had no directions how to proceed. They could not, at least they did not, say that the Lord Jesus had told them what they should do, when the number of the chosen Twelve should be diminished. The suggestion was made by Peter, on his own responsibility, and carried out by the process of casting lots.

Another fact of importance, though of a similar nature, is this—that Jesus never

drew up any conditions of membership such as were enforced in the Church. As a matter of practice, converts were received upon professing their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that simple formula was expanded later on into the so-called Apostles' Creed, which was recited by Christians when they were baptized on being admitted into the Church. Membership was regulated by a doctrinal test; and those who approve of that kind of test, may reflect with pleasure that the practice dates from the earliest days of the history of the Church. Those of us who do not approve of such a test, may take comfort from the fact, that Jesus himself never gave his sanction to any such thing, still less appointed the terms of it.

Consider, further, that Jesus, in common with all his disciples, appears to have believed that he would return again, after no long time; so that there would be the less reason why he should provide for the organization of a Church which would only be temporary. That same belief,

namely, that Jesus would soon return again to earth, probably had something to do with the hesitation of the Apostles to make any decided move. If the time were to be short, as they expected, there was no need to do much. Paul took a very different view. If the time was short, all the more reason to do as much as possible before it was too late. That was why he hurried about as he did; so as to win to Christ as many as he could before the great day should come, when Christ should return to judge the world.

If Jesus held the belief, that the then existing state of human affairs would soon come to an end, that is no ground for assuming that he took steps to found and organize a Church; at all events, in the absence of all other evidence that he did so. And observe, by the way, how this belief throws light on many of the undoubted sayings of Jesus, which are usually considered impossible to put into practice. I refer to some of the commands in the Sermon on the Mount, such as 'Resist not evil,' 'If any man go to law

with thee, and would have thy coat, let him have thy cloak also,' 'Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow turn not thou away.' These, and other such sayings, have as by common consent of Christians, been put aside as either impracticable or even injurious. Does it not make a difference in the view we take of them, if we regard them as intended only for a temporary state of society? I cannot, here, do more than suggest this point, without going into details; and, if it be said that this would reduce all the practical teaching of Jesus to a dead letter, the answer is, that the principles underlying the practical teaching of Jesus are eternally true; the practical application of them must necessarily depend on circumstances, and will be different in a permanent state of society from what it would be in a temporary state.

This is not wholly a digression; for there is one usage, dating from the earliest days of the history of the Church, which is founded upon the act of Jesus himself, and may claim, indeed, to be the carrying

out of a command. This is the observance known as the Lord's Supper, which in its simplest form is a memorial of what he did at the last meal with his disciples, on the night in which he was betrayed. He distributed to them the bread and wine, and said, 'Do this, as oft as ye drink of it, in remembrance of me.' That the Church did wisely to make the Lord's Supper a permanent part of her religious observance, I am not going to deny. But, strictly speaking, there is no such command of permanence in the words of Jesus. There is nothing more than a command, or request, *to those then present with him*, that they should remember him, either in the daily fellowship of the common meal, or, what is equally probable, in the yearly observance of the Passover, so long as they might have occasion before his return. The perpetual observance of the Lord's Supper as a religious duty, to say nothing of the sacramental and mystical meaning attached to it, rests upon the Church's interpretation of the words of Jesus, not upon his own express command.

The other rite or ceremony which has been part of Christian practice from a very early date, namely, Baptism, is also due to the Church, and not to Jesus. Paul, who recognized the Lord's Supper as an important feature in the practice of the Christian Church, said in regard to Baptism, 'Christ sent me *not* to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.' A thing Paul would never have said, if the command contained in the last verses of Matthew's Gospel had really been given by Jesus: 'Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' The Church knew itself to be the Church, when those words were written. That Baptism, apart from the mystical accretions which have spoiled its simplicity, is a solemn and beautiful observance, and that the Church did well to make it perpetual, I most gladly admit; but the authority for it is not the word of Jesus himself.

What, then, was the relation of Jesus to the institution which afterwards was

called the Christian Church? Belief in him and love towards him, were the motive power in the minds of the disciples that impelled them to act; and in this sense he was the cause of the Church, as known to history; but there is nothing to show that he was the intentional founder of it. If he was the founder of the Church at all, then what he founded was something different from the institution which in history bears the name.

It is a remarkable thing, that only twice in all the Gospels is there any reference to the Church, and in both cases in words ascribed to Jesus. Both are in the Gospel of Matthew. One has been already mentioned; the other is the famous saying addressed to Peter, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.' Even if those words are genuine, it is a curious fact that Jesus should only twice have said anything about his Church, if he intended to found one. What he did speak of, and that very often, was not the Church, but the Kingdom of Heaven,

which is not precisely the same thing. The Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of God, denoted in the teaching of Jesus the sovereignty of God in the human soul, and collectively the number of those who lived in accordance with that principle. In a previous lecture, I have tried to show that, in the view of Jesus, the relation of the human soul to God was that of direct dependence, and that the bond of union was Love; resulting, on the one hand, in trust, obedience and devotion, on the other, in beneficent care and blessing. For a human soul to be conscious of that union with and dependence upon God, and to live accordingly, is the meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven, as Jesus preached it. And those who do thus live, are members of the Kingdom of Heaven. The term is a Jewish one, and Jesus put his own deeper and more spiritual meaning into it. The Kingdom of Heaven and the Fatherhood of God are practically two names for the same idea; only that the term Kingdom of Heaven is also used collectively to denote those who lived up to the idea.

Jesus, then, in his preaching, sought to make men realize that they stood in such a relation to God, and that it behoved them to live accordingly. When we talk of the 'Perfect Life,' that means the life of which the guiding principle is the consciousness of being children of God, the motive power the love which, as children, men feel towards their Father in Heaven. That is the ideal life of man. It is this life which Jesus himself actually lived; and it is because he did actually live it, that he has exerted such an immense spiritual influence upon mankind ever since.

The Kingdom of Heaven is established in the earth wherever men try to live up to that ideal of life. Whether or not anyone has ever fully attained that ideal is known only to God; but all that is loving and unselfish in human life and character is an attempt to live up to the principle of the Perfect Life. And thank God there is, amidst all the sin and selfishness that darken the world, abundance of real good in human nature, showing itself in

noble character and brave and beautiful lives, in acts and words which make us feel that Jesus did not live in vain, and that God has by no means forsaken the world, or left himself without a host of witnesses.

These are they, who, whether consciously or not, do their best to live up to the ideal of the Perfect Life; they are of the Kingdom of Heaven; and if Jesus founded a Church, they are members of that Church. Conversely, if Jesus founded a Church, then his Church is the number of those who in singleness of heart love God and love their neighbour. That is a simple phrase, but it means a great deal. Anyone who should fully realize and carry out in practical life all that that means, would not have much more to learn. If the Church of Jesus includes only those who have fully realized and lived up to all that is implied in that short phrase, then the number of those who really belong to his Church is probably not great. But, short of complete attainment, the earnest desire and patient

endeavour to live up to that ideal must surely count for something. And I cannot believe that Jesus would have excluded from his Church those who tried their best amidst the difficulties and temptations and trials of life to love God and love their neighbour in singleness of heart.

If such be the Church that Jesus intended, then certain things may safely be said of it. His Church is not an institution, an organized society, with rules of management and conditions of membership which can be enforced by man against man. Conditions there are, no doubt; at least there is the one condition of unselfish love to God and man. But that is a condition which only God himself can deal with. No man can judge of his fellow-man, whether he does or does not belong to the Church of Jesus. That is known only to God, who 'looketh not upon the outward appearance but upon the heart.'

No existing institution or organized society can be identified with the Church, as Jesus intended it. To belong to any

one of the branches of the institution known to history as the Christian Church, does not imply membership in the real Church of Jesus. Neither does exclusion from one or other of the Churches called Christian imply exclusion from the true Church. That Church takes no account of doctrinal heresy or ritual difference, or of this or that system of government. All are alike indifferent; and those who are as far as the poles asunder in opinions upon doctrine, upon rites and ceremonies and ecclesiastical government may nevertheless be fellow-members of the one true spiritual Church of Jesus. All these differences of belief and practice have their right place, and may serve very useful purposes. I do not for a moment mean to say that the organizations known in history by the collective names of the Church have been a mistake and a mischief. The mistake and the mischief have been the identifying of the historical Church, the organized institution, or any part of it, with the Church of Jesus, the spiritual fellowship of all—wherever they

may be—who in singleness of heart love God and love their neighbour. A Christian is one who tries to do that, to live in that spirit and with that aim; even as it was said, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.'

It is the confusing together of the spiritual Church of Jesus with the historical institution known as the Church that has led to all which is deplorable in sectarian hatred and theological tyranny, and has made the history of the Church so often a record of most unchristian deeds. Men will always differ in opinion; but they need not, as Paul says, 'bite and devour one another' on that account. There is room and work in the world for all the sects, all the different organizations who claim to be part of the historic Church; but the members of these sects and organizations are only then Christians belonging to the spiritual Church of Jesus, if they love their neighbour across all these dividing lines of doctrines, and regardless of them,

saying, 'Let there be no strife between us, for we are brethren.'

His Church, the fellowship of those who are in heart his disciples, is not to be found in any one of the sects or denominations to the exclusion of the others. Its boundaries cut right across the lines of division that mark off one sect from another. For each of those there may be such conditions of membership and order of management as human wisdom and practical sagacity—or the want of it—may appoint. But these do not touch the spiritual Church of Jesus; there, man may not shut out his fellow-men, nor give them leave to enter upon terms; but 'the Lord knoweth them that are his,' and 'to their own Lord they stand or fall, yea, he hath power to make them stand.'

And in this word does Jesus himself declare the nature of his Church: 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.'

THE FUTURE LIFE

THE question, 'What shall be after death?' is only less searching than the question, 'Is there a present God?' It is possible to go through life without thinking of God, or caring about him. It is hardly conceivable that anyone should go through life without once being faced with the thought, 'Some day, I shall die—and what then?' That is a question which does indeed strike home; and all the more, if one has sought to avoid it. Many have faced that question, and found no answer. Some have come to the conviction, that there is no Future Life; many have tried to justify by argument a hope that is stronger than argument that a Future Life does await the soul on the other side of death. Of

these various answers, I will speak presently. I only observe here, that in no age, and in no country, so far as evidence is available, have men been free from the haunting presence of this question of a Future Life; and in their search for light upon the darkness of the solemn mystery of death, is found one element in the pathos and the tragedy of human history on this earth.

It is evident that for each person now living, the question of a Future Life must take the form of a hope rather than a present certainty. The time when the question will be finally answered to us, will be when we cease to live on earth. But the question does not concern ourselves alone. We live now—but many whom we have known and loved have died; and the more we have loved them, the more we are concerned to know if they now have entered upon a heavenly life, and are where, some time, they and we may meet again. It is perhaps here that the question of a Future Life becomes most urgent, and doubt concerning

it most disquieting. I can understand a man rejecting the belief in a Future Life for himself, and meeting death with neither the expectation nor even the wish for anything afterwards. Many have done so, professing themselves contented, and even happy, in the thought that death is the final extinction of all that concerns them. But to see some one else die—friend, or wife, or child—and to feel assured that they are gone, and not merely gone from sight, but blotted out of all existence, so that no future meeting is possible—that is an experience which must strain the philosophy of the most rigid Stoic who ever did violence to his natural affections. In this, as in other things, ' no man liveth to himself alone ' ; and a fate which he might cheerfully accept for himself, looks harder, to say the least of it, when imagined in the case of some one else. And he would be a bold man, not to say a rather heartless one, who should try to comfort some mother, grieving for her dead baby, with the assurance that though she will never

see her child again her sorrow will be ended in death. She will return to dust, and know nothing, feel nothing, be nothing. That is surely a dreary consolation. And, though I am quite aware that this belief in a Future Life must rest on something stronger than merely the protest of the sorrowing heart in the hour of its loss, yet that protest serves to show how strong is the natural craving for that which alone the Future Life can bestow. And that also goes to explain why it is, that the belief in a Future Life has been supported by arguments sometimes extremely weak—never entirely conclusive. It is not possible to prove, with logical precision, that there is a life after death; any more than it is possible to prove, with logical precision, that there is a present God. But it is possible to arrive at an assured certainty of the existence of God, founded on a real knowledge of him, that no proof or want of proof can disturb. And on the basis of that steadfast belief in God, may be founded the belief in a Future Life, with more assurance of

certainty, than can be reached by any other line of thought. If God is the Father in Heaven, then we have the strongest possible reason for believing that there is a Life after Death for his children. Such, at all events, is the ground of my own belief in the Future Life. And to explain, and, so far as I can, to justify that position, is the first part of my task. Afterwards, I shall briefly notice other arguments that have been used to support the belief; and shall then inquire what light, if any, is thrown upon the nature of the Future Life by the argument from the Love of God—more particularly, what may be looked for in regard to the fate of sinners, and the condition of the righteous.

I have, then, to build up the argument from the Love of God. That is, to me, the strongest argument, for this amongst other reasons, that it rests upon something that we can know for ourselves; upon realities and experiences of our own religious nature, quite apart from all external evidence. We ought not to have to learn that which most deeply

concerns us, from sources of knowledge outside ourselves. And, if it be said that, as a matter of fact, we do learn most of what we know, in religion and everything else, from sources outside ourself—teachers, books, etc.—still we only know the truth and reality of what we learn, when we verify it in our own nature and our own experience. If, then, from the love of God which we know, or can know, in our own souls, we can infer a life after death for his children, we stand on firmer ground than if we rested our belief upon the statements of the Bible or the dogmas of the Church.

To believe in God as the Heavenly Father, is to believe that each human soul is the object of his love. It is to believe, not merely that he is the Creator, who has called into existence human beings, and all other creatures, and who rules them under the sway of a general Providence, but that each human soul stands to him in the relation of child to father—the relation of dependence, where the bond of union is Love.

This was what Jesus taught; and in the Fatherhood of God is summed up the revelation which he made. That is to say, the central truth of the religion of Jesus is that human souls, each as well as all, are the direct objects of the Love of God. They depend on him for their origin and continued existence, they share in his spiritual nature; and direct personal intercourse between them is always possible, whether or not it be always, or often, consciously attained. If God is the Father, he must be present, in some sort of living contact, with every soul. That soul may not be aware of him; but he must know that soul through and through. And, if God be the Father, he always was and always will be the Father.

We believe in God as the Father—thereby expressing, as well as mere words can express, our thought of God as he is known and worshipped, in the personal religion of each soul.

The declaration that God is Love, is the statement in general terms of the truth that God is the Father. The latter

is the language of personal religion; the former is its equivalent in the language of the philosophy of religion. This may, perhaps, serve to explain why Jesus never said that God is Love. The phrase only occurs in the First Epistle of John, and is nowhere ascribed to Jesus. It is the expansion, into a general truth, of what Jesus declared concerning the special relation of God to the human soul. And it means that in him whereby we know him as our Father, that whereby we feel his authority as the Moral Ruler, that whereby we acknowledge his Providence, and own him as the Creator and Lord of all worlds—all this is summed up in the one word Love. And this marks the furthest point to which man's knowledge of God has attained. All and everything which God has so far revealed to man—his power, knowledge, wisdom, justice, mercy, pity, long-suffering, and whatever else goes to make up the meaning of what we hold to be Divine—all that is included and expressed in the supreme axiom of religious thought—'God is Love.'

In what I have to say, therefore, I shall take the phrase, 'God is Love,' as equivalent to 'God is the Father in Heaven.' And I begin by suggesting that, whatever light there may be upon the two great mysteries of human life, namely, its origin and its destiny, is to be found in the thought of the Love of God.

Why was the human race ever created at all? Why, in the far-off past, was the first beginning made, of that life of humanity which has risen to its highest glory in Jesus, and has taken great and noble forms in so many others? May not the answer be, so far as human minds can frame it—that the Love of God called into existence those who should be the objects of his love; those to whom it should go forth, those who, being akin to their Maker, should not only be his creatures, but should be able to share his love, and, in some humble measure, return it.

That is merely a ray of light into the very depths of life. It does not illumine and make clear all the mystery. Far

from it. Perhaps it only shows how much more there is of mystery than we had thought. But it is a ray of light all the same; and by its help we begin to have some insight into what may have been the original intention and purpose of God in creating this universe, and calling into existence the human race upon this earth. It is the act of the Love of God in providing the objects of his love. There may have been other ways in which he could have done so; and in other regions of his creation, his love may show itself in other forms. Of these, we know nothing. As regards this world, he has chosen to make it the dwelling-place of a race of beings, spiritually akin to himself. And the whole story of the life of man upon the earth, is the story of how God has watched over mankind, and led them onward and upward, in a path of moral, religious, and intellectual growth. The whole trend of human history—however slow, and marked by interruptions and apparent defeats—is in the direction of an increasing likeness between

the Father in Heaven and the children on earth. It shows a long process of training, of discipline, whereby man is gradually taught to become what God would have him to be—slowly moulded into the perfectness which is to be the final result. Doubtless, if he had so willed it, God could have created straight away a race of perfect beings, in whom he might have found the objects which his love desired. We can only say, that he did not so choose. And we see and know his love in the patient, watchful care which he has shown towards his children during all the long centuries. How it can be, that he should find any satisfaction in the existence of children so blind, so self-willed, so imperfect, is for him to say; not for us. But he appears to do; for his love goes forth to all—however little they know it, and however poorly they return it. Assuredly, it is not because they have deserved his love. Even the best and holiest who have ever lived, would shrink from saying that they deserved to be so loved. If they love him

with all their heart and soul and strength and mind, it is because his love first sought them out, and called forth their love in return.

The creation and preservation of the human race, then, may be explained as the free act of the Love of God. And this Divine love is not shown only to the race as a whole. It might seem, that God was —so to speak—waiting for the finished result of the long discipline which he applies to mankind. It might seem as if all that has yet been achieved of human life were but unfinished attempts, sketches, preliminary studies, of no value in his sight, except as leading up to the perfect end. If that were so, no one could accuse the justice of God, or say that he was harsh. But, if we know anything of the Divine love, we know that it is shown towards each soul separately, and not merely towards all collectively. That is the witness of all who have known most of the Divine love. Why God should love each single soul, even those most out of accord with him, is his own secret, which

no man knows. But that he does is the humble confession, the profound conviction, of all souls that know him.

If, then, the Love of God throws light upon the creation of man, and upon the long story of his life upon earth, and if it does this, not merely for all human life in general, but for each individual soul in particular, then has it not something to say upon the future destiny as well as upon the origin of man, for the individual as well as for the race? If God, in his wisdom and his love, has called mankind into being, and led them upward and onward through the ages, 'sure he still will lead them on.' And, if he visits with his love every single soul of all his family upon earth, then may we not believe that the mere death of the body will in no way interrupt, or put an end to, the Love which he shows towards the soul? Is there not hope of immortality in the present fact of the Love of God? Humanly speaking (and only so can we speak), would it not be strange that God should love a human soul

through the three score and ten years of the bodily life, and then allow, not merely the body, but the soul as well, to be utterly blotted out and extinguished? If he were merely Creator, and nothing more, he might look with unconcern upon the vast array of unfinished attempts that he had made, and might without compunction cast aside as spoilt rubbish the poor human lives that had so little worth. But he is more than creator. He is the Heavenly Father. And he loves the souls whom he has called into being. Why, we know not; but he does. Then, how must it be for him, if death—the mere bodily death—should put an end, for ever and ever, to that union of love in which he has bound a human soul to himself? If our friends die, and leave us, we have hope that we shall meet again, in a better world; and the only comfort for the aching heart is the Love of God which enfolds us all. But for him, there could be no such comfort, if he knew that the death of the body was the end also of the soul. If death snapped, for all

eternity, the bond of love in which, for a few short years, he had united a human soul to himself, then there would be for him nothing but the always repeated pain of parting, and parting for ever. If he loves human souls, so that they are his children, and if there be no life after death, then what a mountain of grief must have been piled up for him, as he has watched through the centuries, and beheld the generations rise and pass away, all the souls whom he has loved, gone from him into nothing—done, finished, blotted out, and every single one a child of his, whom he has watched over, and loved as only he can love. If this were so, then indeed he would be the suffering God that some have imagined him to be, with a hopeless ache of suffering far more than all the sins and sorrows of this present world could inflict upon him.

And all this by his own act, too! For (again humanly speaking), there was no compulsion that forced him to create. If he did so as a free act of Divine love, then may we not feel sure that,

as a free act of Divine love, he will continue the existence of the souls he loves, after the death of the bodily frame in which for a season they have dwelt? It is the soul, the spirit, which is made in the image and likeness of God, and which is akin to him; able to know his love, and to meet it with an answering love. And the death of the body is a mere incident in a life which God has, by his love, made to be immortal. Thus, from the belief that God is Love, there follows the conclusion that there is a life after death for each human soul.

I leave the reader to judge for himself whether this is a strong foundation on which to rest one's belief in a future life. To me it is stronger than all others, because it goes down to the deepest reality known in human experience, namely, the love of God. This argument can stand by itself if need be; and would suffice, though there were nothing else to confirm the belief in a future life. Moreover, it is not open to the objections which weaken the force of some arguments that are used

to support the belief. To rest one's hope of immortality upon the Resurrection of Christ is to entangle it in the very serious critical difficulties which beset the accounts of that event contained in the Gospels. If you do not feel the difficulties, and think that you can accept all that is stated in the New Testament about the resurrection of Christ as literal fact, well and good. None the less the difficulties are there; and if they were not, the conclusion still remains far from obvious, that because Christ rose from the dead so shall we. That he did rise from the dead, that after the death on the cross his spirit returned to God and now lives with him, I certainly believe; but only on the same ground as that on which I believe in the future life of all human souls—past, present, and to come. The real witness of Jesus to the hope of immortal life is to be found in the firm trust in the love of God which he himself felt, and not in the confused and conflicting accounts, by unknown men, concerning what they supposed to have happened

after his death. As an argument for the reality of the future life, the record of the alleged resurrection of Christ seems to me to be without any value or weight at all.

Far more important—and, if not a proof of the reality of a future life, at least strongly confirming the hope of it—is the argument based on the obvious incompleteness of the earthly life. As regards the body, there is a clearly marked series of changes—from birth to maturity, from maturity to decay, ending in death. But in regard to the mind there is no such completion. The intellectual powers are often to be seen in their fullest activity up to the day of death, although the physical instruments of thought and memory may be weakened. The moral progress of the mind still less shows any sign of coming to an end with the bodily death. And the conclusion can hardly be resisted that the earthly life, as we see it lived, is only a small portion, only the mere beginning, of a life that will be prolonged indefinitely after death. It is not what one would naturally expect, that

intellectual powers trained to splendid achievement, or moral character purified and made strong in the saint and the hero, should both be suddenly cut off short by a mere physical event that happens to the body.

And, further, what of the lives that we say are cut off before their prime? What of those who have never had any fair chance, intellectually or morally? What of all the seeming injustice of human life as we see it, if the life on earth be all, and not rather a part of a vaster life whose span is not bounded by the grave but stretches away into eternity?

Considerations such as these do not amount to a proof of a future life; but they certainly do confirm our hope of such a life; and they are moreover in closest harmony with that argument from the love of God which we have already considered. Taken together, they all form a very strong foundation for a belief in the reality of a future life; as I believe, the strongest there is, for a trust that goes deeper down than any proof. And

being wholly established upon facts of the spiritual nature, the argument need take no notice of objections based upon the physical structure of man. As regards the possibility and the reality of the future life of the soul, the physical facts of death are entirely neutral. If belief in a future life include a belief in the resurrection of the body, then the case is different, and the difficulties formidable. But the resurrection of the body is a doctrine with which I am in no way concerned, and which I do not hold in the very slightest degree.

Having now, to the best of my power, set forth what seem to me the strongest grounds for the belief in a Future Life of the soul, after the death of the body, I proceed to inquire what conclusions, if any, we may reasonably form as to the nature of that future life. And here let me remind you that of what actually shall be hereafter, no one knows. I believe, with all the energy of my mind, that there will be for each one of us a life after death, as I believe that the souls of those who have died in past times are

living now. But it is not within human knowledge to say positively what happens to the spirits of the departed, or what they do. And in what I have to say upon the nature of the life hereafter I attempt nothing further than this: To ask if the same consideration of the love of God which leads to the belief in a future life may not guide us to some at least helpful view of what that future life may have in store for us.

One conclusion is quite obvious, and it is this: That, if there be a future life at all, there is a future life for every soul without exception. I accept that conclusion. I do not hold to the view that immortality is conditional upon character and conduct in this life. And my reason for not holding that view is, that I believe in immortality as the result of God's love, not as the reward deserved and earned by the virtue shown in the life on earth. My argument is, that God called human souls into existence to be the objects of his love, and that he maintains them in existence for the same reason and to the

same end. Therefore, there is ground for believing that he will prolong the existence of the soul after the death of the body, since otherwise his own purpose would be defeated. Conditional immortality implies that human sin can make God forbear to do that which he intended, or tire out the patience and exhaust the love which began the discipline of the earthly life. It is not a question of man's deserving immortality at all. No one deserves it. It is a question of God's fulfilling his own purpose. And it is inconceivable that God should allow the act of his own creature to frustrate and put an end to the final attainment of his will. If it be said that some are so wicked that no amendment seems possible, I reply that we are not entitled to judge of degrees of wickedness. The greatest sinner who ever lived is nevertheless in his origin one of God's children, however much he may have defied and rebelled against his Father. And it is, to say the least, a strange conception of the Fatherhood of God to say

that he will allow that 'stubborn and rebellious son' to work his own destruction, to say that infinite love has no way of bringing that hard heart to repentance. I therefore hold the consistent belief, with all its consequences so far as I see them, that for each human soul there is a life after death; and that God will fulfil his purpose towards each human soul by training it through such discipline as he may see fit, to the condition of final perfection.

When we speak of a life after death, we are apt to think of it as equivalent to Heaven, a state of blessedness and joy and peace. That is certainly one of the possibilities of a future life, but not the only one. If it were, then there would be a manifest injustice in supposing that those who live evil lives on earth should, after death, enter straightway upon an immortality of bliss. But, on the lines of the doctrine which I am explaining, the future life is, in itself, merely continued existence, and may be far otherwise than joyful. And it is here where

differences of character and conduct during the earthly life find their result. By the way in which we live on earth, we make our own Heaven or Hell in the life to come. It is difficult to believe that Heaven and Hell are two distinct places or regions, and that the good go to one and the bad to the other. There is no such dividing line between the good and the bad as would be needed on this theory. And if only the good, i.e., necessarily the perfectly good, go to Heaven, the number to be found there will be but small.

But it is different if we think of Heaven and Hell as what we make for ourselves in the life hereafter, by what we are and what we do in this life. It is said that when we leave this world we can carry nothing with us. At least, we carry with us character and memory. And are there no possibilities of terror in the thought of a future life in which the sinner shall see himself as he really is, and be confronted with the remembrance of all the evil that ever he has done? When he shall see the good that he turned away from, and

the miserable things that he chose in preference? When he shall see what he might have been, and what he has become? When he shall see the consequences of his evil deeds spreading evil in other lives, and be powerless to stop them? Is there no terror in such a prospect? And if it be the Love of God which continues his existence, may there not be to the hardened and impenitent soul, so long as it remained hardened and impenitent, a veritable agony of suffering in the mere presence of that solemn and awful Love? That is one of the possibilities of the future life; and many a one, thinking thereon, would be glad to believe that there was no future life at all. 'God is not mocked; and what a man sows, that shall he also reap.' This, too, is part of the love of God. Truly, it is only fools who make a mock of sin.

Such a condition I believe to be the inevitable result of sin—at all events of unrepented sin—in the future life; and that there could be a worse Hell than such a state I am unable to imagine. But the

thought of the love of God (which is the clue to the whole conception of the future life) leads us to understand that the suffering of the guilty soul is not vengeance inflicted by God, but the necessary consequence of its own acts; and not only so, but the suffering marks the first stage of the discipline by which the love of God will purify and restore that guilty soul. If the crooked is to be made straight, the process will not be without pain. If the soul, disfigured and warped by selfishness, which is the root of all sin, is to be fashioned again into that image and likeness of God in which it was made, surely it must needs suffer. And because God is Love, and all souls, even the guiltiest, are still his children, he will not leave one of them for ever alone with his sin, but will, out of sheer mercy, administer the needful discipline of remorse, repentance, and forgiveness, whereby that soul is saved. All this follows from the belief in immortality by the love of God; and though that belief has no place for eternal torment, still less for a mere Hell of

physical torture, yet none who fully realize what it means will say that it is a comfortable doctrine that lets the sinner off too easily. And it has this in its favour, that it asserts the final and complete fulfilment of the purpose of God towards each human soul, without resorting to the futile and feeble conclusion that the Almighty and all-loving God lets himself be defeated by human sin, and ends the vain endeavour to recall the sinner by pronouncing upon him the sentence of final damnation. You may tell me of wickedness for which you say no repentance is possible; you may say that by sin the conscience is seared and the very soul destroyed, and that for such there can be no other fate than total extinction. I answer that you are not God, and you do not know. But, if he is indeed Almighty Love, then of a surety even the hardest and guiltiest soul will not for ever hold out against him, but will at last give way and turn again to the Father.

The belief in immortality as a consequence of the Love of God, leads thus

to an expectation of moral discipline, by which the soul is to be purified and restored. The form and the measure of such discipline will depend on the character and conduct of the soul that has to submit to it. And those who have spent their days on earth, doing their best to love God and their neighbour in singleness of heart, will not need to fear what the future life may have in store for them by way of discipline. Because they know the Love of God here, and they will know it no less hereafter. For them, the future life will be Heaven—the state of more perfect service, more perfect knowledge, and more perfect union with God—the attainment in fuller measure of all that, in loving God, they have in the earthly life most longingly desired. Whatever the unselfish heart can look for as its fulness of joy, that it may hope to realize in the future life. None of us dare call ourselves good; and how much of heaven we shall find in the future life, we may not venture to forecast. But this, at least, is certain—that as God is our Father

here, so he will be our Father there; and whatever he may see fit to do with us, to purify us from the stains of our earthly life, we shall be in our Father's hands, whose purpose towards us is only Love. We can, therefore, trust him; and when our time comes to go hence, can say: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

If you have at all followed the thought that I have been working out, of the future life as an existence of the soul apart from the body, and depending on the love of God, then you will not expect any attempt on my part to say what the souls of the departed do in the future life; what Heaven is like, or where it is. Of these things, I have nothing to say. I know nothing. Many have tried to suggest, in glowing language, and in terms borrowed from the earthly life, what may be the arrangements of the next world, and the occupations of those who dwell in it. All such attempts must utterly and completely fail; and I venture to say there is not a single one of all the

visions of Heaven that have been described—from the Book of Revelation downwards—that one could, with one's whole heart, believe to represent the real truth. I know, at all events, that I have never met with any attempted description of Heaven which did not seem unreal and impossible. Of all that, we shall know when our time comes; and we can only say, at present, that God will appoint for us what we shall do, and it will be better than we could, in our present ignorance, imagine or desire for ourselves.

Nevertheless, although we refrain from the attempt to represent the joys of a Future Life in figures borrowed from the earthly life, and have, therefore, nothing to say about white robes, and golden harps, and thrones and crowns and the like, there still remains something to be said as to the nature and the possibilities of the life hereafter.

The same thought which has guided us all along, viz., that immortality is by the Love of God, and is necessary for

the fulfilment of his purposes towards the soul, will lead us to the conclusion that in the future life there will be progress, moral and intellectual growth, increase of knowledge, and gradual advance towards moral perfection. Heaven, if it is to be heaven at all, cannot be a mere stagnation, a dull monotony of bliss, vainly imagined to be perfect joy. If the souls of the departed are to *live*, they must live in the full and free exercise of their noblest powers, enlightened reason, purified conscience, and exalted love. And here comes in the consideration, founded on the incompleteness of the life on earth, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. If that incompleteness is a reason for believing that life is continued after death, it is equally a reason for believing that the life after death implies intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress.

Stated in other words, this means that there is no finality in death. It means that there will be chances in the life hereafter for those who had few or no chances here. It means, that though a man die

a hardened and impenitent sinner, there will still be a possibility of repentance; rather, I would say, a terrible certainty of discipline, or moral suffering needful to restore him. It means, that the opportunities denied here will be given there; and that the lives cut off in their prime, or in youth, or infancy, find there the completion of their full span. We cannot know why such lives are thus, as we say, untimely ended. Few bereavements are harder to bear. But, at least, the belief in immortality by the love of God helps us to rest in the assurance, that there is no real frustration of the purpose of their lives. God calls them hence, when he sees fit; and surely they serve him there, as they did or would have served him here. In the existence of the soul, the fact of the death of the body may be hardly more than a passing incident—a sleep and an awakening, but by no means the all-important and dominating fact which we commonly think it to be.

But death, though it be no occasion for fear (since we are in the hands of God,

wherever we are), is nevertheless the termination of the earthly life; and it implies of necessity, the parting of those who have loved one another here. I think that is the aspect of death which chiefly we dread. We could calmly meet death ourselves; but the thought of bidding farewell to those dearest to us, and of knowing that on earth, at all events, we shall never see them more—that is a thought which no loving heart can bear unmoved. What, then, of meeting hereafter?

I believe, with an intense conviction, that we shall all meet in the Future Life. If immortality be, as I have throughout maintained, the act of the Love of God, necessary for the fulfilment of his purpose towards the soul, and if, as a consequence, all souls without exception live on after death, then surely it would be against all reason to say that those who have known and loved each other here, shall not meet again hereafter. If, indeed, you hold to conditional immortality, and say that only some, few or many, will live after

death, then I know not what ground you may have for believing that you will meet in the next life those you have loved in this. They might live in heaven, and you might be destroyed. But if all departed souls live on, then, though they pass through such stages of moral discipline as are appointed for them, still all are there; and surely the love of God, which has allowed them to be near and dear to each other on earth, will not keep them apart in heaven. I do not presume to guess how such meetings are effected, or how the old friendships and unions of affection are resumed, after the separation caused by death. Will the child that died in infancy, be still the child, when the mother whose loving heart has treasured the image of it for years and years, at last meets it in the next world? God only knows. Those who have loved each other here, will surely meet again; death does not quench their love, and heaven will heal the grief of their parting. There are those who love without being loved, and carry through life an aching

heart, for which earth has no cure. And in other ways, the relations in which we stand to each other in this world are difficult, if not impossible, to think of as existing in the life hereafter. When I think of these things, I always rest in the conclusion, that all will be ordered for us by the Love of God our Father, of whose love alone it is that we shall live, or do live, at all. We are in his hands, here and hereafter; and neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from his love.

The sum of all that has been said is this, that God is Love, and therefore he has called into existence human souls to be the objects of his love; therefore, he will continue his unchanging purpose towards them after the change involved in the death of the body. His purpose is seen in the gradual training of the soul into spiritual likeness to himself—the attainment by all his children, every single one, of a perfection like to his own. And though for awhile, through the changes and chances of this mortal life,

the faults and sins, the error and ignorance, to which human nature is liable, his children serve him in this world imperfectly or not at all, yet his love must finally prevail, and bring back at last every wandering child, every lost prodigal, to the Father's house. That is the love of God shown to those whom he has called to be his children. Not for any merit of theirs, for towards him they can have no merit; but of his own free grace of Love, he orders our lives so that, after death, we live on in some closer union with him, and through eternity, in the fellowship of all holy souls, serve him with ever more perfect service, and in his presence find utter fulness of bliss.

FAITH AND FREEDOM

In the foregoing lectures I have offered for consideration statements and explanations of belief upon five great subjects of religious thought. These statements and explanations constitute, so far as they go, a body of theological doctrine upon those subjects. Of course they make no pretension to completeness, even of outline. I have only tried to make clear the point of view from which the several subjects have been studied, together with some of the main results which follow when the subject is studied from that point of view. I have in each lecture described and explained what I myself hold to be true upon the several subjects. I have expressly disclaimed all desire or purpose of committing anyone else to an agreement

with my own views. But, all through, I have offered these statements of belief as Unitarian Affirmations. Of those who read them, some will say 'I don't agree with this view,' and some will say 'I don't agree with that.' And those who say so will include Unitarians. Then what right have I to say that they are *Unitarian* Affirmations, if even Unitarians would not accept or agree with all the views expressed? I have this right, that I have throughout kept fast hold of the principles which all Unitarians maintain. It is on principles that Unitarians agree, not upon doctrines. This is all-important for the understanding of Unitarianism. Anyone who attempts to dispose of it as merely a set of doctrines will miss the real point altogether. He may show that the doctrines are erroneous (or that he thinks them so); but that will not prove Unitarianism to be false. To do that, it must be shown that the principles are to be condemned, by following which Unitarians arrive at their doctrinal views. Those principles are summed up in the

two words Faith and Freedom. And if anyone asks you what Unitarians stand for, say that they stand for Faith and Freedom; and you will give, I believe, the best answer that can be given to that question. What is implied in that answer I have now to try and make clear. I have to say what are the main principles upon which Unitarians agree; and in doing so, I shall use the lectures hitherto given as illustrations.

By placing Faith first among the things which Unitarians stand for, I mean to state the fact that Unitarians have a positive religion, a real belief in God, as a living Being, a divine Person towards whom they stand in a certain relation. A Unitarian is not an Agnostic, still less an Atheist. The Agnostic says 'There may be a God; but if there is, we cannot know anything about him.' The Atheist says 'There is not a God.' The Unitarian says 'There is a God, and we can know him, and we do know him.' Thereby the Unitarian takes his stand on the common ground of all believers in God, namely,

faith, which is the soul's trust in God on the strength of its own experience of him. To say of a Unitarian that he is an infidel (i.e., a man without faith, an unbeliever), is to use an unkind epithet, which has not even the poor merit of being true. So far as faith goes, i.e., a real belief in the living God, Unitarians are the very opposite of infidels. In my first lecture, I laid some stress on this point, and explained, as well as I could, the general form which as a rule Unitarians give to their belief in God. That form differs from the form adopted by other Christians, being simply the statement that God is the Father Almighty; whereas other Christians say that he is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three persons in one God. Of the reasons why the Unitarians adopt the one form and reject the other, I have already spoken. My point at present is this, that the difference between Unitarians and other Christians is in the *form* of their belief, not in the *fact* of it; and it is only those who cannot understand the possibility of

religion under any form except their own who deny that we have a religion and call us infidels.

That Unitarians stand for Faith, before everything else, implies further that their religion is not merely intellectual, but also moral and spiritual. And nowhere is this more true (or more often denied) than in regard to their belief in God. That Unitarians are accustomed to the free and full exercise of the power of reason upon subjects of religious thought is true enough, as I shall say more at length presently. But no Unitarian ever maintains that reason can dispose of the whole matter. There are, in the nature of God, depths of mystery which the reasoning power of man is utterly unable to fathom. We think of God and call him by the name of our Father in Heaven, because that name expresses more fully and more truly than any other what God is, so far as we know him, so far as he has been pleased to reveal himself to human souls. But of what he is in his own inner nature, no man knows or ever has known. And one

reason why we do not accept the doctrine of the Trinity is that it does not throw any real light upon the mystery of God's inner personality, although it professes to do so. A doctrine which explains the Unknown by the Unintelligible does not carry one very far. And when the exponents of the doctrine of the Trinity have said their last word, they have told us nothing that we did not know before about him whom we worship as the Father Almighty. If the doctrine of the Trinity means less than that, it is insufficient; if it means the same thing, it is unnecessary; if it means more than that, it is unwarranted. The Unitarian, believing in God as the Father, has a religion which satisfies the reason, enlightens the conscience, and provides for all the spiritual needs and longings of the soul. It is the expression of his whole nature in regard to God. It does not compel him or command him to forego the use and exercise of any of the powers of thought or moral judgment or pure affection which God has given him.

Rather, he deems that as God has given him such powers, he is bound to use them as fully and freely as he can. And in the particular case of the mystery of the Divine nature, he says 'I humbly and reverently acknowledge that I do not and cannot understand all that God is; I know something of him, and therefore I look up to him as my Father in Heaven. But why should I confuse my mind by accepting as revelation the results of the vain attempt to make reason do what it cannot do; and, in place of the Divine mystery, adore a human mystification?' It is not Unitarians who have over-strained the power of reason to the breaking-point. It is those who have tried, and failed, to express the inner mystery of the personality of God in intellectual terms. I do not know what more I can say to make it clear that Unitarians have a positive religion, a full and complete religion, including within it all the elements, spiritual, moral, and intellectual, which a religion must have if it is to be a living faith, and not merely

a barren theory. If there be some who still say that we are without a religion, I must leave them to the persuasion of advocates more convincing than I.

By Freedom, which is the second main principle for which Unitarians stand, I mean all that is necessary for the full development and exercise of Faith. Faith without Freedom is a mockery; and Freedom without Faith is a delusion. Therefore I beg the reader to bear in mind, in what I go on to say about Freedom, what I have already said about Faith. The Unitarian claims and exercises the fullest freedom in regard to religion, for the sake of the religion, not merely for the sake of the freedom itself. Now, therefore, concerning Freedom. Unitarians maintain the right and duty of every one to express his religious beliefs, whether as doctrine or as worship, for himself, free from all external human control whatsoever. That is the ground principle upon which Unitarians agree. From that principle, honestly and fearlessly acted upon, follow all the results

which distinguish Unitarianism from other forms of Christianity. What those results are, and how they arise, I will try to show.

First, observe that we have to do here with a principle, not with a doctrine. The difference between them is this: a principle is a rule of action, and a doctrine is a statement of fact, real or supposed. Two people may agree in holding a principle, although they get to different results by the use of it. Our ancestors who built the first Stand Chapel held the same principle, of religious freedom, that we do now; the results to which it led them, namely, the doctrines which they held, were very different from the results to which the same principle has led us, namely, the doctrines which we hold.

But two people cannot hold the same doctrine, unless for both of them it states a truth. Obviously not. They cannot agree upon a doctrine, if one thinks it true and the other does not. A principle is a rule which can be followed with perfect loyalty, under changing circumstances, by different persons, or successive genera-

tions of persons. A doctrine, stated in words, cannot adapt itself to changed conditions of thought. It can be explained away by clever theologians, when it has become inconvenient; but it remains a fixed thing. The Athanasian Creed, for example, is a definite statement of doctrine, which says and teaches what it has said and taught for some thousand years or more. People either believe what that creed teaches or they do not believe it; and if they are in a position where that creed is made a test of orthodoxy, they reconcile themselves to it as best they can. That applies to every statement of belief, in the form of a doctrine.

Unitarians agree, then, in holding a principle, namely, that of freedom of thought in regard to religion. They do not insist upon agreement in any doctrine whatsoever. They know nothing about heresy; and the only possible heretics amongst them, would be those who should attempt to infringe the liberties of the others in matters of belief.

What this principle of individual free-

dom rests upon is, I suppose, the fact, that a man's religion is in the last resort a matter between himself and God. It is his own sense of his relation to God, his own thoughts and feeling about that relation, his own experience of the presence and influence of God in his life. However closely our lives may be bound up with those of others, however much we may learn in religion, as well as in other things, from the fuller experience and knowledge of others, and from the stored up wisdom and piety of past ages, nevertheless, in the inmost sanctuary of our own soul, we are each of us alone with God. What little we know, *we* know. What we feel or believe, or hope or trust, is our own feeling, belief and hope and trust, and not that of anyone else ; though others may have the like feelings. And if there be, as I believe there have been, revelations of God made in the lives of great men, still such revelation would not enlighten our darkness until its light had come into our mind, until we had received through our own faculties what had been

revealed. Even if the Bible were, in every word, the one full and final declaration of God's truth, we could only become aware of it, and receive its instruction, in and through our own minds, and only so far as we were capable of receiving it.

If, then, man is to know anything of God, if he is to be in any way aware of his relation to God, the means and instruments of such knowledge must be in his own nature, part of his mind, belonging to him as man. And this is what is meant by saying that religion is natural to man as man. He acquires and holds it by the exercise of the faculties of his mind, i.e., the spiritual nature, or soul whereby man is akin to God.

Freedom to exercise those faculties fully, is the natural right of man, if he be so constituted. Because no one can establish any claim to come between the individual soul and God. There is no foundation for such a claim. The direct and undivided responsibility for the soul's life and welfare rests finally upon the individual.

Therefore, it follows that, when a man seeks to know what is true and what is right as regards himself, he has no other final authority than his own reason and his own conscience. There is no other final authority to which he can appeal. There are, indeed, what are often regarded as final authorities, and accepted as such; but these are outside of him, and form no part of his own nature. It is certainly strange, if God has made man such that he depends for what is of supreme importance upon what he may have never heard of. These outward authorities are the Bible and the Church; and the principle of free exercise of the natural powers of the soul forbids the acceptance of either of these as final authorities, over-ruling the intimations of the reason and conscience.

Many people accept the principle of private judgment, but in a less extreme form than this; and not even all Unitarians would go so far. Early in the last century, few if any Unitarians would have done so. What was understood by them as the right of private judgment then,

and by many who are not Unitarians now, was the right of judging for oneself *what Scripture taught.* The Bible was raised to the position of the final court of appeal by the founders of Protestantism. They took their stand upon the word of Scripture as against the decree of the Roman Catholic Church. And amongst Protestants, the right of private judgment, wherever it has been claimed, has been, usually, the right to read the Bible for oneself, and receive its teaching direct without the notes or explanations of any self-appointed instructor. That is the position of many Nonconformists now, as it was the position of the older Unitarians. The final authority was the Bible, and the test to be applied to every doctrine was the question, ' Is it Scriptural ? '

But the right of private judgment, as most Unitarians claim and exercise it, means the right to judge the Bible itself, and all else that is outside one's own mind, by the standard of reason and conscience. This is the only complete Freedom of Thought, and that it is the natural right

of every man as man I have already tried to show. It is here that the great difference begins that divides us from all other Christians, and makes our position so little understood by them. The result of holding this position is not difficult to see. Each man is responsible for his own beliefs and disbeliefs. We cannot go to him and say, 'See, the Bible says so and so; you must accept that as true.' That only is true for him which he in his own mind sees and knows to be true, by the exercise of his own reason. It is so much of the truth as he can discern. His power of reason is his means of discerning truth, just as his eye is his means of perceiving light. What he sees depends on the light which enters his eye; and what he discerns of truth depends on his reasoning power. A blind man may be told of things that he cannot see, but no light comes to him. And one may be informed of all sorts of things that are said to be true; but they only then are recognized to be true when we can grasp them in our mind. There is no real escape from the position that

we can only judge of truth and right by the powers of mind which God has given us. I do not know why anyone should wish to escape from that position; but many people think that there is something shocking about it. Why is it shocking to trust more in the powers that God has given to us, than in the mere word of man, as written in the Bible, or spoken by a priest? 'Oh, but that isn't the word of man; it is the word of God, whether written or spoken.' How do you know it is the word of God? You cannot answer that question, without relying on that very power of reason in yourself which you profess to distrust. Suppose you read in the Bible, that Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stand still, while he fought the battle of Beth-horon; and that they did stand still. Your reason tells you (at least, if you have studied astronomy), that the Bible describes here an absolute impossibility. The sun does not go round the earth, and could not, therefore, be stopped in its course. And if the moon had been

stopped, the book of Joshua would never have been written, for no one would have been left alive to write it. The moon would have fallen on to the earth, and probably have dashed it in pieces. Now, if you say that the Bible is the final authority, the final standard of what is true, then you have got to accept and believe in Joshua's miracle, right in the teeth of what you know to be facts. You can't go and pick and choose out of the Bible (as you say that Unitarians do), if the Bible is your final standard. You must take all, if you take any. There it stands in the Bible, in black and white, that the impossible thing happened. And you tell me that God wrote it there for me to believe as his own truth. Perhaps you do accept it and believe it ; but if you do, you know that you have to stifle the protests of what you call your carnal reason against so manifest a defiance. What is there shocking in saying, 'This story is an old-world tale, told when people did not know any science. By using their power of reason, men have come to know

better about such things; and it is no reverence to God to deny the truth as we know it in our own minds, for the sake of an old story, written many hundreds of years ago.' That is what any Unitarian would say. To him, the truth as he sees it in his own mind impresses itself with more force than anything written in any book, even though that book be the Bible. In other words, he claims and exercises the right to judge the statements of the Bible by the standard of his own reason, and its morality by the standard of his own conscience. A Unitarian, therefore, acting on his own principle, is free to do what is called picking and choosing in the Bible. But it is a great mistake to suppose that Unitarians simply please themselves what they accept and what they reject. No Unitarian ever dreams of saying, 'Here is something I like; I will believe that. There is something I don't like, I will have nothing to say to that.' What he really does is to study the Bible as he would any other book, and accept or reject its statements according

as they justify themselves to his intellect. If the evidence in support of some alleged event is very strong, he has to accept it as true, whether he likes it or not. If it was a mere matter of liking, I would rather believe that Peter was not the coward that he showed himself to be on the night of the trial of Jesus. If it was a mere matter of liking, I should be glad to believe that some things in the Gospel of John were spoken by Jesus; but I cannot believe either the one or the other, because the evidence seems to me to be strong against them. Of course, I may be mistaken; but that is not the point. The point is, that, using as best I can such power of reason as I have, the truth appears to me quite other than what I should like it to be, and I cannot help myself; there is the truth as I see it; and, seeing it, I must acknowledge it. So it is, all the way through; though they go the full length in freedom of thought, Unitarians never follow merely their own inclinations and preferences in what they believe. They seek by means of reason

to know the truth, as much of it as they can ; and by means of conscience to know the right. And what they find they abide by. If it was only a matter of liking and disliking, do you suppose that Unitarians would remain in the unpleasant position of being called heretics and infidels, and treated as outcasts from the Christian Church ? But they put up with that, because they will not disown what to them is truth ; no matter what anyone else may believe or not believe. I believe that Jesus was not God. That for me is the truth. If I was the only man left in the world who believed that, it would still be for me the truth. If I disowned it, I should escape from a disagreeable position of unpopularity, and I should be a liar.

' Well, but,' says somebody, ' who are you to put your own opinion against that of much better and greater men than yourself ? Is it not presumption on your part to refuse to believe what the vast majority of Christians have believed ? ' I am very sorry if it is presumption. But

what can I do ? I want to know the truth, and I use all the means I have to find it ; and that is what I get to. If other people get to a different result by other means, I cannot help that ; it is their own affair. I can only see what I can see, and no more ; and if I am in the state of spiritual blindness in which, as a Unitarian, I am supposed to be, still I must not pretend to see what I do not see. And that is what I should be doing, if I put aside my own convictions in order to agree with the majority. But I need hardly, perhaps, explain that no Unitarian ever professes to be wholly independent of either the Bible or any other external source of knowledge in religious matters. The Unitarian will seek for light wherever it is to be found ; and so far as the Bible is concerned, I said, in a previous lecture, enough to show that Unitarians regard the Bible as the richest treasure of recorded religious experience to be found in any literature. It is only that when an appeal has to be made to a final authority we refuse to acknowledge the Bible as such. For us

it is not the judge, but one of the chief witnesses.

I have tried to make clear what is the standard by which Unitarians judge of truth and right, and how they apply that standard. Each has to judge for himself, by means of the powers of mind which he possesses, what is true and what is right. It follows at once that no one may interfere with the beliefs and convictions of another, or impose his own beliefs and convictions upon that other. No one, who accepts the principle of individual freedom in religious thought, can answer for the beliefs of anyone except himself, or has any right to demand that others shall agree with his own views. That is one main reason why Unitarians will have nothing to say to a fixed creed. It would, perhaps, be possible to draw up a list of statements which would fairly represent what the majority of Unitarians do as a matter of fact believe; but such an attempt would be denounced quite as severely by those whose beliefs were set forth in that list, as by those whose beliefs were

not included. All would say, 'This is an interference with individual liberty where no one has any right to interfere. It is an attempt to set up a standard of belief, a doctrinal test. If it is not that, it is worthless; if it is that, it is mischievous.' Besides, however well such a creed might be drawn up, it would act as a bar to future progress of thought. No one has any right to say that this or that doctrinal statement represents full and final truth, and that no better way will ever be found of stating it. Those who believe in the full freedom of man as man to express his religion for himself, either in the form of doctrine or of worship, believe that revelation is progressive, that God has not said his last word, and that the way must always be kept open for new truth to come. Only so can the personal relation of the soul to God be kept as a living reality; tie it down with a creed, and sooner or later you kill it.

If, then, you ask for a Unitarian creed, you ask in vain; there is no such thing. There is no document in existence which

you could take and say, 'This is what all Unitarians believe; this is what a man would have to accept if he became a Unitarian and joined one of their congregations.' There is no doctrinal test of any sort or description which is imposed by Unitarians upon Unitarians.

Here you will remind me that in the lectures already delivered, I have said that Unitarians believe this or do not believe that. For instance, they believe in God as the Father Almighty, and do not believe in the Trinity. Yes; but they are not *required* to believe the one and disbelieve the other. Merely as a matter of fact, most Unitarians would probably agree in the simpler form of belief in God. But if they do, that is only because they, each for themselves, think that the simpler form is the truer. No Unitarian has any right to say to anybody else, 'If you are a Unitarian, you must not believe in the Trinity.' He has no right to challenge the beliefs of another, in any way at all. Whatever bond of union there is amongst Unitarians, it is not a doctrinal one.

'Well, then, what is it? How is it possible to have congregations of Unitarians when you have no guarantee that they will all believe alike? And how is it possible to preach to people when you do not know what they believe, and are forbidden to ask them?' These, I suppose, are questions which those who are not Unitarians sometimes ask themselves, possibly without arriving at a satisfactory answer.

We associate together on the ground of religion, not on the ground of doctrine. We agree in the desire to worship God, and serve him; and we join together for the purpose of helping each other in this common object. We agree in the desire to do good and be good amongst our fellow-men, and we find in religion the source of all strength and inspiration and guidance for the living of a true life. Thus, we stand for Faith before all. But we further agree in thinking that it is of more consequence to live rightly than to believe correctly. We say that what each one believes or does not believe is

his own affair; but, if he can join with us in worship and work, if he finds that he can be helped himself and can help others in the common purpose of living the life of love to God and to man, then there shall be no question raised of what his opinions may be. Religion before theology, character before creed, is the basis of association in our congregations.

'Well, but is religion possible without theology? You must state your beliefs somehow, if you are to say anything about religion at all.' Certainly; and these very lectures that I have been giving are evidence that it is possible for a Unitarian to speak with some degree of definiteness upon subjects of religious thought. But in these lectures I have simply stated what I believe and why I believe it. I have not held it out to you as something you must straightway accept and believe. You must judge for yourselves. I am not here to do your thinking and believing for you, but only to help you in doing it for yourselves. What religion you have, and what doctrinal opinions you hold, is

your responsibility, not mine. All I can do, and I think all you ask me to do, in the matter of theological teaching, is to tell you what seems to me to be true. You can take it or leave it, as you find it convincing or otherwise. That is the position of all ministers of congregations which unite on the basis of Faith and Freedom, i.e., of religion without the requirement of doctrinal agreement. And there is no difficulty in the practical working of the system. If there should happen to be a wide divergence of theological belief between minister and congregation, that would probably, but not necessarily, make it difficult for the preacher to minister to the religious life of the congregation, which is his proper function. In that case, the natural course would be for them to part by mutual consent. But there is never demanded from a Unitarian minister any pledge that he shall believe and teach certain specified doctrines; and such a pledge, if it were demanded, would certainly not be given.

The grouping together into congrega-

tions of those who adopt, to its full extent, the principle of Faith and Freedom, is a purely voluntary arrangement. It is the association of those who are like-minded in their religious sympathies and ideals, and who do not feel it necessary to tie themselves up in any bond of doctrinal agreement. Each for himself, they form and hold their own opinions upon all subjects of religious thought, and have not even a common standard, either of truth or right. Those who think that this is a very loose arrangement, and that it is much safer to have it all put down in black and white what they are to believe, are free to seek the shelter of communities where orthodoxy is studied. We claim our own freedom; and at least we find, and have found for generations past, that we can live in peace without bringing accusations of heresy against each other.

I need hardly add that the freedom we claim includes not merely freedom of individual thought, but freedom of each congregation to manage its own affairs, without control either by a central govern-

ing body or by the State. Such is our Freedom. And if the term Evangelical had not come to mean a good deal else than preaching the Gospel in the form in which Jesus preached it, then of all the Evangelical Free Churches, Unitarians would be the most Evangelical, as they are the most free.

Names, however, come to have meanings in the course of history and by long usage very different from their original meaning. And I am not going to make any claim to the name Evangelical. As that word is now understood and used, it is the rightful property of a large group of Christians whose theology is not that of most if of any Unitarians.

But the name Unitarian in like manner has had a history, and has changed its meaning. When first used it included Jews and Mohammedans. And I do not believe that anyone now, who uses the name, would use it in that sense. What the name does mean now is a question upon which a great deal of time has been spent, and not very wisely spent. I have

no desire to reopen the controversy. But some will say that I have no right to attach the name Unitarian to the various principles and doctrines that I have spoken of, or to say that the way of Faith and Freedom which I have sketched and illustrated is Unitarianism. Well, I simply observe these two facts—first, that certain people do hold the principles of Faith and Freedom in some such manner, and with some such result in the way of doctrine and practice, as I have indicated; second, that these people are commonly called Unitarians. That which matters is the principle, not the name by which it is called. The name has got to fit the thing, not the thing be sacrificed to the name. What we in our churches stand for is Faith and Freedom, and as a matter of practical necessity, the name Unitarianism has to mean *just that;* no matter what it may once have meant. It is not the least use to fight against the name. And I for one am not going to waste my time over a barren discussion. I have no objection to the name Unitarian so long as I can

explain what I mean by it. I care nothing at all what it once meant. To stand back from work that is waiting to be done, and refuse to help in a common cause, on the ground of a mere historical objection to the name, is to go into bondage to the past. Such bondage to the past is the one thing that the upholders of the free religion now called Unitarianism have always protested against. Why have they, and why have we, always refused to accept the authority of ancient creeds and decrees of councils as binding upon us? Because we have said that those creeds were true for men in ancient days and are not true for us now, and that it is not right for the past to bind the conscience of the present. Why have we refused to admit that even the Bible is a higher authority than our own reason and conscience? Because the Bible, too, is the work of men in bygone centuries; and great and glorious as its noblest teaching is, we refuse to allow the dead past to prevail over the living present. We refuse to read only the word that is written, even though it be the word of

men who spoke by Divine inspiration, and shut our ear to the voice of the living God speaking to us now in our own souls. Why have our fathers gone aside from the beaten track and broad highway of the religion of their time to hew out new paths for themselves? Because they were compelled to choose between being slaves of old tradition and doctrine no longer true, and being free men of God. And why do we yet remain, the outcasts of the churches—so that men shall speak of 'Unitarianism *and* Christianity,' as if we were heathens? Because God speaks to us in our hearts, and we choose rather to hear what he says now, than what was said 'to them of old time.'

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. We believe in him and worship him, and trust him and love him, *not* chiefly because our fathers did so, but because in our present lives now we know him. If we did not, if our own inner life were a perfect blank in regard to him, then all the experience and all the treasured piety of all the past could never give us a religion, a living faith in the living God.

For such a living faith in the living God, and full freedom for its growth and development, Unitarianism stands; for the present reality of communion with him, apart from and independent of such communion in the past. God speaks to man now, as he spoke to prophet and apostle. He has not shut up his revelation in one particular Church, or finished it on the last page of one particular book. From the beginning even until now, he has made himself known to men, as a living Presence, not as a mere tradition, however sacred. Whatever other Christians may do, Unitarians stand to affirm that, by refusing to be bound by the past. We will learn from the past all that we can, and rise on stepping-stones of dead and worn-out beliefs to nobler and fuller visions of truth. But we will not allow the dead hand of the past to hold us back from the full life and truth of the present, or from hearing that voice Divine, which says to each one of us now living, 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak to *thee*.' The religion which is called Unit-

arianism—which many call our heresy—is a great and noble religion, be the others what they may. There is no deepest and fullest thought of the love and goodness of God but finds its place there, no clearest call of duty but speaks in it with Divine authority. There is room in it for every noble faculty of mind and soul to find free scope and full satisfaction. And if there be defects and shortcomings, they are in us who profess the religion, not in the religion we profess. That noble ideal of religion is what is meant by Unitarianism; and after that way, which most call heresy, we worship the God of our fathers.

THE END

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